

VIDEOGAME

A D V I S O R

AUGUST 1995
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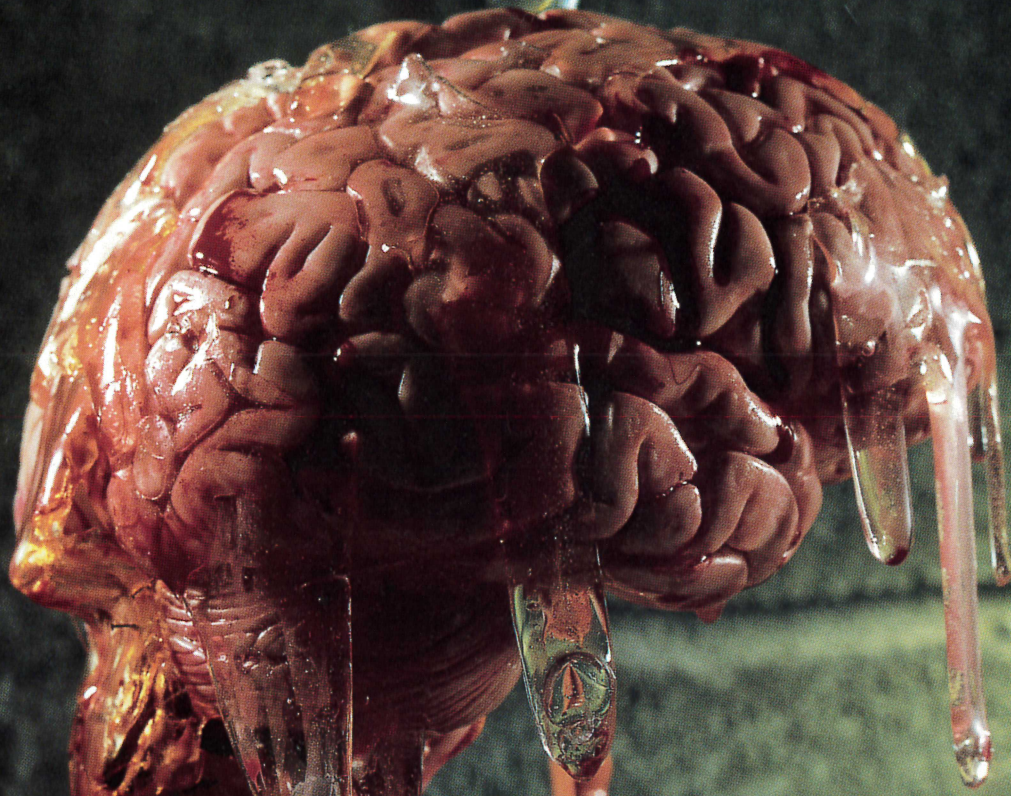
The Interactive Gaming Industry Guide

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 4

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Reorganization Continues as NAKI Names New Chief Operating Officer

By A VGA Staff Reporter

NAKI Electronics, well known for their interactive gaming accessories, has announced a major reorganization of their company management. Recently appointed to the position of Chief Operating Officer is Michael Myers, a skilled financial manager with nearly 20 years experience in investment banking. Included in his initial accomplishments at NAKI was the appointment of a new marketing manager, Martin Pichinson.

Myers' first priority is to streamline NAKI's financial structure, reduce overhead and lead the company into its next generation of games accessory product announcements. "NAKI is one of the industry's most highly regarded names in the electronic games accessory market, and I see a continued

presence for NAKI as the market for interactive games products continues to grow," said Myers.

In associated news, NAKI Electronics has announced a new line of controllers for both the Super Nintendo and Genesis systems. The pads will feature a turbo-touch joypad, and will allow the player to program in the desired button functions. The pads will retail for \$29.99.

NAKI will also be coming out with a controller similar to the Turbo-Touch, featuring a "rocker-style" joypad that will retail for approximately \$24.99. The manufacturer claims that their patented turbo-touch technology will reduce sore thumbs that aching players feel after long hours of play. **VGA**

More Growth for the IDSA

By A VGA Staff Reporter

The Interactive Digital Software Association has added four new companies to its ever-growing membership of software developers. The action was taken in an effort to serve as a representative to the ever-changing and diverse interests of the electronic entertainment industry.

On July 10, Douglas Lowenstein, President of the Interactive Digital Software Association, announced that

Compton's New Media, GTE Interactive Media, Ubi Soft, and Williams Entertainment joined the ranks of such software companies as Nintendo of America and Virgin Interactive to propel the total membership of the IDSA to 30 companies.

Members of the IDSA hope that this growth will only add to broaden representation of the increasingly expanding interactive marketplace. **VGA**

PlayStation hits the Nation

By Zach Meston

Let there be no doubt, friends and neighbors: the Sony PlayStation is the most anticipated home videogame system in the industry's 20-year history. It has the backing of one of the largest consumer electronics firms on the planet; it has the most advanced technology of any system on the market, (the dubious "64-Bit" claims of certain companies notwithstanding); it's entering the marketplace at a time when the industry desperately needs a boost; and, most importantly, it has tremendous



software support, with dozens of impressive titles nearing completion. But is the future for Sony really as bright as it seems? Read on and find out....

There Can Be Only One

Sony's first and foremost problem as the PlayStation looms is that their resources are scattered far and wide. There's Sony Computer Entertainment of America (SCEA), based in California; there's Sony Imagesoft, based in California and New York; there's Psygnosis,

based in Massachusetts and England; and then there's the newly created Sony Interactive label, (a.k.a. Sony Imagesoft), based God-knows-where.

Sony Imagesoft's Dana Oertell tried to help me make some sense of it all: "It's still being determined if we'll continue to use the Psygnosis label. Sony Imagesoft won't be used. The titles that Imagesoft has been developing will go under the marketing umbrella of SCEA. Imagesoft will continue to develop products, but as a separate divi-

sion that doesn't have a (official) name yet. Product Development is still currently headed by Kelly Flock [president of Sony Imagesoft]. There may also be a new label for Sony's PC products, or they might be marketed under the Sony Interactive label." In other words, confusion reigns at the moment.

What's happening to Sony's worker bees as their companies are being moved around at a frantic pace? According to Oertell, "The workforce has been tight-

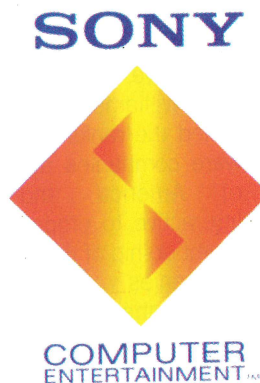
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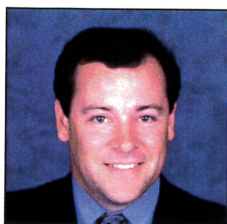
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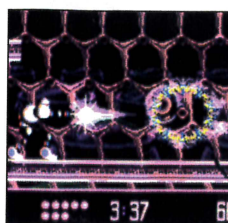
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Corporate Alliance Begets Interactive Game Shows

By A VGA Staff Reporter

Source Media Inc. announced that they have begun an agreement with Dreamtime Imagineering Inc. to develop an interactive television game called *TimeZone*. The show is being created for subscribers of the Interactive Channel. *TimeZone* is a game show for the 21st century because, unlike tradition-

al television, the viewers at home become the contestants..." said Larry Matthews, a Dreamtime Partner.

TimeZone has contestants pitted against the clock trying to place historical events in chronological order. The Interactive channel is set for launch this year. **VGA**

3DO Strengthens It's Position in Software Development with Industry's Top Producer

By A VGA Staff Reporter

The 3DO Company announced the appointment of Joseph Ybarra, well known producer of entertainment software, as executive producer and vice president of Studio 3DO. The 3DO Company is well known for their cutting edge software titles under the label Studio 3DO as well as being a leader in the 32-bit interactive entertainment industry with the 3DO Interactive Multiplayer system. Ybarra's responsibilities at 3DO will include the creation of overall studio strategy, management of all producers, and delivery of software to the market.

Ybarra has more than 13 years of industry experience. He was a co-founder of Electronic Arts where he was responsible for hit titles such as *Julius*

Erving and *Larry Bird Go One on One*, *Starflight* and *M.U.L.E.*. Ybarra also ran his own company, Ybarra Productions, and was Vice President of Software at Creative Insights, where he perfected his skills in the production of software titles.

"In the last six months, we have been hiring the industry's best creative talent to make Studio 3DO the premier software publisher in the market," said Bob Lindsey, General Manager of Studio 3DO and senior vice president of marketing. "Joe's creative talents and strong track record are integral to our effort as we expand from 32-Bit to 64-Bit gaming with our powerful next-generation M2 technology." **VGA**

New On-line Service Benefits from Experience

By A VGA Staff Reporter

Chris Lombardi, the former editor of the popular consumer magazine, *Computer Gaming World*, has become a part of TEN, the newly formed Total Entertainment Network (TEN).

TEN is an online service geared to computer players, and will feature gaming forums, online news, and network capabilities for modem play. Lombardi hopes to take the reputation he earned as editor for *Computer Gaming World* and use it to build TEN to its fullest potential and, as Lombardi

states, "redefine the genre."

TEN will initially be available for Windows '95 users, with a later version supporting the Macintosh format. **VGA**



Panasonic Reduces Retail Price of 3DO Multiplayer

By A VGA Staff Reporter

Matsushita Consumer Electronics Company (MCEC) announced a \$100.00 reduction in the suggested retail price of the Panasonic FZ-10 REAL 3DO Interactive Multiplayer system. The new lower price is \$299.95 and will continue to include the software title, *GEX*, from Crystal Dynamics.

The 3DO platform has continued its growing strength in the market even with continued competition from 'next generation' systems. The Panasonic unit is now available in over 9,000 outlets including new and expanded North American and European distribution channels. Over 200 titles

are currently available for the system, with 185 more in development. Speculations were made on Wall Street that between the enhanced distribution channels and the price drop, 3DO has received a much needed boost, as indicated by the movement of the stock in recent weeks.

"The acceptance of 3DO as the first and foremost 32-Bit system has resulted in a worldwide upswing in sales," says Gene Kelsey, assistant general manager, Interactive Media Division. "Combined with the support of retailers and the software industry, Panasonic is well-positioned to enter the fall selling season." **VGA**

Dreamers Guild Goes On-Line for MPG-Net

By A VGA Staff Reporter

Los Angeles-based interactive entertainment developer, The Dreamers Guild announced the production of six on-line multiplayer games for MPG-Net. The Dreamers Guild/MPG-Net lineup runs the spectrum of gaming genres, including strategy, sports, first person, and classic conquest & battle. The Dreamers Guild products constitute a large part of MPG-Net's offerings for The Microsoft Network, Microsoft's planned on-line service. Despite the claims and complaints of current on-line services, the Microsoft Network is slated to begin operation in the fall of 1995.

"We're very pleased with the timing of this," stat-

ed Dreamers Guild President Bill Simpson. "The Guild is poised to become one of the largest on-line game developers. We've been pressing for on-line activity the past couple of years, and now it seems everyone else is starting to catch on. There are no two ways about it; the future of interactive entertainment is going on-line."

Simpson sees a successful future for his company, which has grown over 100% in every year of operation. "Our agreement with MPG-Net couldn't have worked out better. Everyone has been talking about how to create superior interactive projects for tomorrow. Tomorrow is finally here."

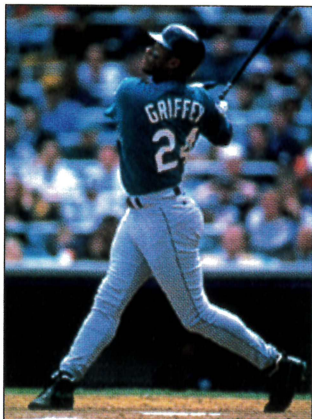
Ken Griffey Signs Deal With Nintendo

By A VGA Staff Reporter

Nintendo of America recently announced that they have signed an exclusive deal with baseball star Ken Griffey Jr.. Nintendo will be producing two games with Griffey's name on them, the first will be a baseball game for the Super NES that is being produced by Rare, Ltd., and it will use the same breakthrough graphics that were first seen in *Donkey Kong Country* last Christmas.

Griffey is quoted as saying "It's going to be realistic... but not just in looks. I want it to feel like it actually does to play in the 'big show'..." Also included are all of the Major League stadiums, logos, colors, and uniform designs. The game

is scheduled to ship at the start of the 1996 baseball season. The second game will be another baseball title, however this one will be created exclusively for the Ultra 64 and is tentatively scheduled for release in late 1996 or early 1997. **VGA**



Harris Launches Another Consumer Magazine

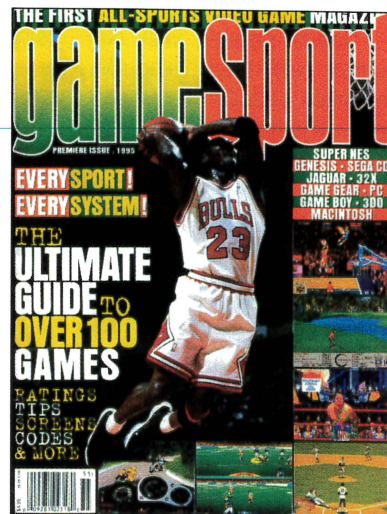
By A VGA Staff Reporter

There is a new magazine for those video game players who just can't get enough of sports games and feel that the majority of consumer magazines simply do not devote enough space to their favorite genre. This new magazine, *GameSport*, is devoted solely to the sporting scene in the videogame market.

Gamesport, published monthly by Harris Publications, Inc., made its debut one month ago. Titles covered in the first issue ranged from the year-old *Madden '95* for SNES and Sega Genesis, to the recent PC CD-ROM

game, *Nascar Racing*.

The cover price is \$4.95 per issue and may be worthwhile to carry in your store if you find that you rent or sell a fairly large amount of sports-oriented titles. **VGA**



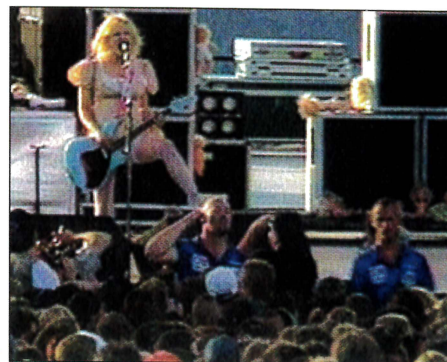
Sega Gets In Tune

By A VGA Staff Reporter

Sega of America said it would showcase its newly released Sega Saturn interactive videogame system at the Lollapalooza music festival this summer. More than 15 units will be set up in a booth at each Lollapalooza venue, allowing attendees free access to games like *Virtua Fighter* and *Daytona USA*.

"By teaming up together, we can effectively reach a broad cross-section of the cutting edge, techno-savvy 18 to 35 year-olds that we feel define the Sega Saturn market, in a fun, laid-back forum," said

a spokesperson. Lollapalooza, organized by musician Perry Farrell, begins its North American tour for the fifth year on July 4 at George, Washington. The tour, featuring such modern rock acts as Hole and Sonic Youth, will play 29 concerts in 25 cities. Also, the concert shall feature a wide range of cultural and social booths. **VGA**



Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. Reports and Hopes for Continued Rise in Revenues and Expansion

By A VGA Staff Reporter

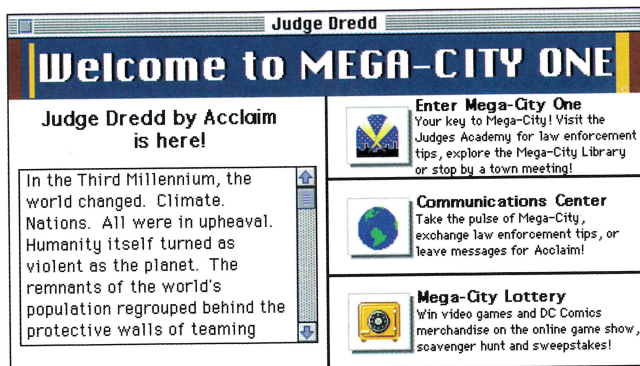
Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. of Glen Cove, NY. reported revenues of \$105 million for its third quarter ended May 31, 1995, and a net income of \$9 million. Revenues reflect an increase of 18 and 14 percent, respectively, over the same period in the prior year.

"We're pleased with our quarter performance and the continued strength of our balance sheet," said Robert Holmes, president of Acclaim. "During the quarter we expanded our content resources by obtaining rights to Pressman Film Productions, made a commitment to support Microsoft Windows '95, and unveiled more than 45 titles for CD-ROM systems." Holmes added "Despite the maturation of the 16-Bit games market, we feel the fall and holiday selling seasons will be strong for the industry as a whole, and our lineup of both cartridge and

CD-ROM products leave us uniquely well-positioned to capitalize on both market segments."

The leading third-party developer has also become one of the most cutting edge in terms of marketing technology. Recently, Acclaim has begun doing regular business with several on-line services and are in the process of developing their world wide web site. The newest application of their new marketing techniques can be found on America On-line in the videogame forum, (managed by VGA's Jeff Tschiltch).

Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. is a leading publisher of software and peripherals for Nintendo, Sega, Sony and personal computer and CD-ROM systems; and comic books under Valiant, Armada, and Windjammer imprints. Acclaim also develops coin-operated arcade games. **VGA**



Atari and Activision Strike Deal for Jaguar

By A VGA Staff Reporter

Atari Corporation said it has finalized a deal with Activision Inc., under which Activision will produce games based on classic Atari titles for multiple new platforms. Also, Atari said Activision's *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure*, will be

released for Atari's Jaguar game player in mid-September. "Our collaboration with Activision will offer exciting entertainment for both Jaguar consumers and PC users," said Ted Hoff, Atari's president of North American operations. **VGA**

Saturn Software Released Before Official Hardware Launch

By A VGA Staff Reporter

Sega of America has once again taken retailers by surprise. The early limited release of the Sega Saturn hardware in May has prompted Sega to bump up the release of additional titles to all outlets. The official nationwide release of the Saturn was set for September 2, "Saturday". It was expected that the Saturn software would be available in September

along with the system, but pre-orders were due by July 18 for the August 1 limited software release. Although retailers and distributors said that the early release of the 6 new software titles would not have a big effect, they are expected to sell at a 3-to-1 ratio to the hardware. The price range for these titles vary from \$39.99 to \$69.99. **VGA**

SCEA announces two new Directors for the PlayStation launch


By A VGA Staff Reporter

Sony Computer Entertainment has announced the assignment of two industry veterans to key positions in the upcoming PlayStation launch. Jack Tretton has been appointed as the Director of Sales, and Jean Galli has been named the Director of Consumer Services.

"Obviously with a new product, it's important that we have a very motivated strategic thinker managing our sales efforts," said Jim Whims, Senior Vice President of Sales. "Jack has the experience and industry savvy to make things happen." In his new position, Tretton will work on the implementation of sales strategies and managing the company's sales force. Tretton's videogame background is as the General Manager for JVC Musical Industries, Inc., where he directed operations for the international videogame publisher.

Jean Galli's new position as the Director of Consumer Services will help to generate a wide range of customer support elements on behalf of SCEA. "An important mechanism we will use to differentiate ourselves from our competition is the delivery of unsurpassed customer support. In Jean, we are getting a true team builder capable of creating a department that will define the industry standard," said Stretch Anderson, SCEA's Vice President of Operations. **VGA**



The background of the entire page is a vibrant, swirling mass of orange and yellow flames. Two mechs are depicted in a dynamic pose. The mech at the top is dark-colored with a large, rectangular headpiece featuring a grid of small lights. It has a rounded torso and its arms are extended downwards. The mech at the bottom is also dark, with a more angular head and a visible '4th' insignia on its chest. Its arms are spread wide. The overall composition is energetic and dramatic.

MECHWARRIOR 2

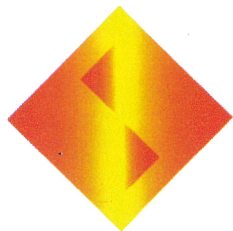
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by Sega's strategy. We have in place what we intend to do. We're not ignoring what Sega's doing; we simply don't think their current strategy is very good. Summer months are historically not good sales months. And they

alienated a lot of retailers [by only releasing the Saturn to certain outlets]. Why emulate that?"

Don't get suckered by the endless stream of rumors that Sony is going to ship the PlayStation onto retail shelves any sooner than September 9th. (Internet weenies had the PlayStation "confirmed" as coming out as early as July 15th, with some of the biggest lamers even claiming to have bought the system.) "We're not going to bump up the launch of the PlayStation," Vassallo says matter-of-factly.

Sales and Marketing

The job of transforming the PlayStation hype into ringing registers belongs to Jack Tretton, SCEA's Director of Sales. So, Jack, has it been a hard sell getting retailers to stock the PlayStation? "It's been a very easy sell. They're all VERY excited about preselling the hardware. They're confident they can sell a good chunk of product. The main concern is that there's not enough product to go around; there's more demand than supply. Some retailers want a bigger

slice of the pie than they already have. They see the PlayStation as an opportunity to take market share from their competitors, so they want to suck up as much of the initial product offering as they can."

So, Jack, what's the deal with this *Ridge Racer*/PlayStation bun-

dle thing? "*Ridge Racer* [a driving game from Namco, based on the smash-hit arcade coin-op] and the PlayStation are a 'soft' bundle. *Ridge Racer* isn't packed in, but sold on a 1:1 basis with the PlayStation. When a retailer orders a PlayStation, he also orders *Ridge Racer*. The consumer doesn't HAVE to buy *Ridge Racer* when he buys a PlayStation, but he could, and probably will."

What about the Saturn? Has its early appearance impacted Tretton's ability to get PlayStations onto shelves? "I really have to root for the Saturn," says Tretton, surprisingly. "If the Saturn was doing poorly, retailers might not be as excited about the PlayStation." From the dismal Saturn sales figures being heard through the gossip grapevine, you'd think retailers would be dreading the PlayStation, but they're not, which leads one to believe that the PlayStation's positive buzz has been affected very little by Sega's actions. Indeed, Tretton proudly mentions that the PlayStation will be "in 15,000 storefronts" for its September launch.

While Sony has precious few sales and marketing numbers they're willing to divulge to the press at this time, Vassallo did say that a rumored \$40 million '95 advertising budget was "a safe figure." Vassallo couldn't give a breakdown of how the money will be distributed, but did mention that television spots will start airing on August 15th, meaning less than a month of buildup (and presales) before the PlayStation debut.

ened slightly. A lot of it has to do with people's choices. Almost everyone was offered positions, but some were yet to be determined. Some people chose to stay in their geographic area instead of relocating to a new job." Oertell, who is being personally affected by the switcheroos (she'll be working in Sony's PC software division), also dropped this tidbit: "A lot of marketing people from Imagesoft are going over to SCEA, since they're familiar with marketing games."

Which brings us to what I, your humble scribe, see as a potential chink in SCEA's armor. Not to belittle the efforts of Sony Imagesoft's marketers, but you'd have a hell of a time finding someone who was impressed with the company's marketing approach or its long history of big-license-poor-game-play product. When I posed this question to SCEA's Andrea Vassallo, she candidly said: "Some of the marketing workforce of Imagesoft is being added to SCEA." Hmmm.

Is all this last-minute shuffling a sign that Sony isn't quite as organized as they'd like? Not according to Oertell: "We're strengthening ourselves before the launch of the product. Pulling people together [from different areas] is strengthening our company, rather than taking away from it."

The Sega Factor

With Nintendo's vaporous Ultra 64 not scheduled for release until well into 1996, the only major competition for the PlayStation this Christmas is the Sega Saturn, sneakily released on May 11th, nearly four months before "Saturday." But did this move steal Sony's thunder? Not particularly, says Andrea Vassallo. "The fact of the matter is, our strategy is not being dictated



Tretton says about SCEA's TV campaign, "We're not going to rip-off Sega or anyone else. We're showing as much as we can of the gameplay. We're really excited about the technology, and we want that to come through loud and clear in the advertising." Look for more shots of games in action and less of Sega's, (or Nintendo's, since their blatant stylistic rip-off), in-your-face approach.

I asked Dana Oertell about the amazing amount of free press the PlayStation has received in consumer game magazines over the past year. How will Sony build on that? "We can educate the user about how the games are developed, and why it's easier to develop on the PlayStation than the Saturn. We can talk about how the graphics are better, about how the gameplay seems to be tighter. Little

things like that."

Of course, it's still too early to say exactly how SCEA will push the PlayStation to the Teeming Millions. Vassallo: "The marketing campaign is far from done now. It was far from done at E3 when we launched. Marketing is a lot like art: when you show a product to fifteen people, you get fifteen different ideas of how it should be presented." (The trick, of course, is making the public think you're selling the Mona Lisa and not "Dogs Playing Poker.")

Having cunningly lobbed a few softball questions in Andrea's direction, it was time to hit her with the mother of all queries: just how many PlayStations does Sony expect to sell this year, anyway? "We don't make our sales projections public." Certainly she can give me something, I plead. "I would say to look at the Japanese sales figures. As of

May 29th, one million PlayStations have been sold to retailers in Japan, with a 90% sell-through. There's a 4:1 software-to-hardware sales ratio." Therefore, even in Japan, where consumers will buy damn near anything in droves, the PlayStation has to be considered a success. (Near as anyone can tell, it's also outselling the Saturn.)

The Killer App?

With an estimated 20 titles to be available for the PlayStation at or near its launch date, the one drawing the most attention in the consumer gaming magazines is *Mortal Kombat 3*, a stunningly accurate conversion of the popular arcade coin-op. Scheduled for release on October 1st, the PlayStation version of *MK3* is a next-generation exclusive - consumers won't be playing *MK3* on a Saturn, 3DO, or Jaguar until April 1996

Can SONY Compete?

By Greg Angelo

The Sony PlayStation may have a powerful CPU and boast some of the most impressive graphics on the market, but if the system is to succeed in such a volatile market, it will have to prove that it can give the established powers of Nintendo, 3DO, and Sega a run for their money.

Nintendo has yet to throw its hat into the ring of next generation hardware, but with the release of the Ultra 64 less than a year away, Nintendo has managed to keep many gamers from jumping into the 32-Bit marketplace; instead making them wait for a system supposedly twice as fast and less expensive than its competitors.

The 3DO Company promises strong competition as well. In 1993 The 3DO Company pioneered the jump from 16-Bit to 32-

Bit machines, and they again plan a similar jump with the announcement of their M2 upgrade, making the 3DO a 64-Bit machine that will be the supposed 'most powerful machine on the market'.

Finally, what is currently the largest and most immediate threat to the success of the PlayStation, is Sega of America. For months prior to the release of both systems in Japan, many were watching and waiting to see who would win in the battle of these two giants. Sega got the jump on Sony by two weeks, and droves of stores sold out of the Saturn within the first days of its release. The marketing and advertising power of Sega, as well as the pack-in of *Virtua Fighter*, proved to be powerful incentives to buy.

The PlayStation's Asian debut however, was not as spectacular as Saturn.

While Sony did attempt to push the system with a multi-million dollar ad campaign in Japan coupled with in-store marketing for retailers, the system did not sell as well as had been expected in its initial weeks. Sony did show that their marketing team was not to be overlooked, with downtown Tokyo storefronts cluttered with various point of purchase displays. At press time, Sony was running behind their already tardy marketing schedule and had not yet completed any final versions of their P.O.P. displays.

Perhaps one of the most often overlooked aspects of the 'next generation war' will lay firmly in the hands of the marketing and advertising directors of the respective companies. Just as corporate buyers are being forced to make some difficult decisions in regard to carrying product

lines, so have consumers been left with personal purchasing decisions. The consumer magazines have been touting the technologically advanced PSX as the superior product, however, in the end the mighty arm of marketing tends to hit hardest.

Only time will tell what the outcome of this battle between Sega and Sony will be. As of now though, results are inconclusive, and act only as an indication of the extreme consumer confusion which characterizes the present market, one that is comprised of multiple factions with no definite path to follow for the future. Our best advice will be to keep a watchful eye on the advertising campaigns in which the manufacturers are pouring millions. This alone will prove to be an excellent barometer for consumer spending this season. **VGA**

Sony PlayStation Launch

By Greg Angelo

Software support for the Sony PlayStation and Sega Saturn vary greatly. Ultimately, it has always been the software which carries a system and sells units. The approaches to software licensing and development on the part of Sony and Sega differ greatly, with each company hoping that their methodology and plan for software development is the one that will allow their next generation system to topple the rest.

Sega, at present, has relied for the most part on itself for software support. Games such as *Greatest Nine Baseball* and *Astral* have managed to keep many Saturn owners in

Japan amply happy, with the pack-in of Sega's arcade smash *Virtua Fighter* doing more than its share to persuade consumers into purchasing a Saturn.

Sega also has a top-notch line of arcade games which are supposed to be ported over to the Saturn in the near future, including *Virtua Fighter 2*, *Sega Rally*, and *Virtua Racing*. Sega does have a long list of third-party licensees, but the future of the system will be decided upon by the amount of software available, and right now almost all Saturn software is published solely by Sega.

The PlayStation, on the other hand, is using its roster of third-party licensees

to the fullest. Companies such as Konami and Midway are already busy programming games for US release such as *Ultimate Parodius* and the PlayStation's ace-in-the-hole, *MK3*, which promises to be a near perfect arcade translation. Conversely, this widespread usage of third-party developers has caused a sharp discrepancy in software quality, with games ranging from the excellent *Ridge Racer* to the blocky *Space Griffon VF-9*.

In mounting their surprise launch, Sega has also put the pressure on their developers. Until that fateful day at the E3, many of them assumed that they had until September of

October to continue developing and enhancing. By launching early, the release schedule moved forward swiftly and several third party manufacturers dedicated more R&D time to the Saturn product than the PSX. At press time, Sony had no official word on what software would be available for launch or even soon afterward. The standard line at SCE, "We can neither confirm nor deny...", will only make this launch more difficult than need be. The importance of software for a new system cannot be underestimated, and this software battle may well determine which system will be victorious in the war. **VGA**



at the earliest.

While no one at SCEA knew, (or would admit to knowing), much about this exclusive arrangement, it could have a major impact on the early sales of the PlayStation. Remember what happened when Capcom released *Street Fighter II* exclusively for the

Super NES in 1992? Both the game and the system sold in huge numbers, helping the Super NES catch up to the Genesis in 16-Bit market share. Of course, it has to be said that *Mortal Kombat 3*, while a popular game, isn't remotely close to the popularity *SF II* was enjoying at the time of its SNES release.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the *MK3*

exclusive is that SCEA managed to negotiate a deal the likes of which we haven't seen since Nintendo controlled its third-party licensees with an iron fist in the late 1980s. It takes more than promises to get a third-party company to commit its products to only one platform, especially in 1995's system-saturated market; it takes a belief that the platform you're choosing is going to dominate. (Either that or, as the rumors have it, a tidy sum paid by SCEA to Williams for exclusive rights.) It'll be very interesting to see if Sony lands more exclusive deals in the months ahead.

I'm Not a Psychic, But I Play One in VGA...

My lengthy chats with SCEA and



my observation of various market factors leads me to make this humble prediction: barring a terrible marketing campaign, (which, given Sony Imagesoft's dubious history, is not an impossibility), or another industry shakeout (which is also not impossible, but that's a topic for another article), the Sony PlayStation will be the dominant videogame platform for years to come. Retailers, software companies, trade & consumer gaming magazines, and consumers alike are rooting for this machine - and with that rather broad support base, it's hard to envision the Sony PlayStation not becoming the next big thing. In the battle for the hearts and minds of buyers and retailers, the PlayStation is loaded for bear. **VGA**





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Windows '95

Enters the Fray – Welcome the Newest Contender in the Platform Wars

By Jeffrey Tschiltch

12

AUG
1995

Microsoft's

Windows '95 is the

most anticipated

operating system in

the history of PC

computing

Delayed for more than a year, Microsoft's Windows '95 is the most anticipated operating system in the history of PC computing, promising an end to DOS and true "Plug & Play" capability. But what does all this mean to the PC user, what will it do for PC gaming, and how will it affect your buying decisions in the future?

What is it?

Windows '95 is touted to be the first version of Windows that isn't "layered" on top of DOS; it's an entire operating system in its own right. What this really means is that DOS (now at version 7 with Win '95) is more tightly integrated with Windows; the PC still boots up the way you would expect a DOS PC would, but gone are the hassles with autoexec.bat and config.sys files and all the device driver loads are hidden behind a flashy "Loading Windows '95" splash screen. There is still a DOS directory out on the hard drive, but these programs are mostly for compatibility with your old DOS applications, nearly all of which will run in a DOS window, even if they didn't under Windows 3.1.

What about games?

As a Windows user for over five years, one of my big doubts regarding Windows '95 was how well DOS games would be supported under the platform. I've been using the various beta versions (now up to build

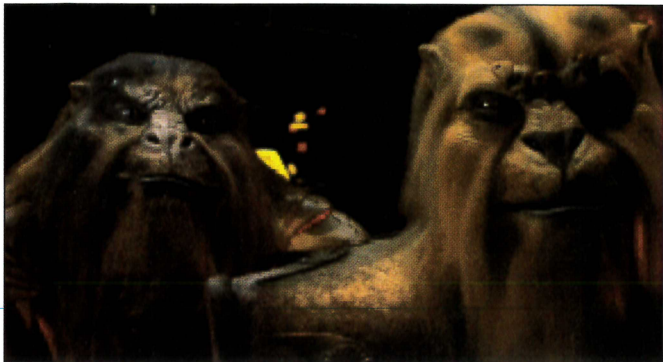
490 with the latest June Beta release) for several months now and have yet to find a game I can't run under Win '95. For advanced DOS games that use special features such as VESA video drivers or expanded memory, Win '95 allows you to create custom DOS environments by defining specific config.sys and autoexec.bat entries that are unique to that game. The concept is similar to creating a "boot diskette," except now it's all contained in a Windows icon and when you finish the game you boot back up to Windows automatically.

Software Development

While compatibility with our "legacy" DOS software is important, the big news for gamers is that Windows '95 looks to be the new gaming development environment of choice. Game developers have typically shunned



the Windows 3.1 environment since it was very difficult to achieve the types of frame rates that today's gaming animations require. This meant that every developer had to go off and create their own graphic engines and try to deal with thousands of different hardware combinations existing in PCs; no easy task as any PC software retailer can tell you based on complaints received



from customers who couldn't get games like *Wing Commander III* to run on their system.

Windows '95 tackles this development nightmare in two different ways. First off, Microsoft has developed a special Game Software Development Kit (SDK) that gives programmers direct access to PC hardware while remaining in the Windows environment, something not possible in Windows 3.1. The SDK APIs also take advantage of the fact that Windows has already loaded all of the correct device drivers for accelerated video boards, CD-ROM drives and sound cards, and provided the programmer with access via a common set of interfaces without having to develop custom device drivers of their own. Windows '95 includes special 3-D graphic engines that developers can tap directly into. The June Beta CD-ROM includes a game called Hover as proof that "DOOM"-style games can easily run within Win '95. All of this means that higher quality games can be developed faster than before while at the same time eliminating the installation frustrations often experienced by PC gamers and thus reducing the number of software returns for retailers.

Plug & Play

Hardware upgrades are a fact of life for PC owners. Faster CD-ROM drives, better sound cards, tape backup units, modems, additional RAM and hard disk storage; these are all things that power users crave and, if

you are a PC retailer, things that you would like to sell them. While PC peripherals and upgrades are currently selling well, a great many PC owners have shied away from adding that new piece of hardware due to the inevitable complexities that installation of such devices always seems to bring. Nothing ever seems to work on the first try due to DMA settings, IRQ conflicts or faulty I/O selections. All of those problems are a thing of the past now, however, due to Windows '95's new Plug & Play feature.

Plug & Play is hardly an original concept, as owners of Apple Macintosh computers will happily tell you. Its execution for PC computers certainly is, however. Now instead of trying to manipulate your config.sys file with command lines and manually resolving memory and device conflicts, all the Windows '95 user need do is install his new Plug & Play peripheral or upgrade, whether it's a new CD-ROM drive or the latest video card, then turn the computer on and Windows '95 will do the rest. The operating system automatically detects the hardware, loads any required drivers that may be needed and resolves any internal hardware conflicts such as interrupt settings and the like. After Windows '95 has completely booted, up the user has the option of "fine tuning" the hardware installation by running the "Add New Hardware Wizard".

Windows '95's Plug & Play feature isn't just for new hardware carrying the "Win '95 Ready" logo; Microsoft had included support for most of the current popular add-in products currently on the market. For example, when I first installed the Windows '95 beta on my Pentium 100 clone, the operating system correctly identified my Pro Audio Spectrum 16 audio card, detected that I had a Plexor double-speed CD-ROM drive, attached and loaded the appropriate SCSI driver, and automatically configured my PCI IDE hard drive, I/O adapter and S3 video card with special 32-Bit drivers for optimal performance. Even though Win '95 no longer requires autoexec.bat and config.sys files, it removed all unnecessary lines from these files and left any special settings, such as path statements, so when I launched a DOS window within Win '95 it would act just as it had before I installed the new operating system. If you can press the "Next"

*Plug & Play is
hardly an original
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of Apple Macintosh
computers will
happily tell you.*

Microsoft has

borrowed some of

the best features

of the most

popular interfaces

Microsoft has already secured some top third party developers to produce software exclusively for Windows '95. Including:

- **Activision**

Atari 2600 Action Pack 2
Earthworm Jim
HockeyDrome
Mechwarrior 2
Pitfall: Mayan Adventures
Shangai: Great Moments
The Great Game
Zork Nemesis

- **Apogee**

Fury3

- **Blizzard**

Pax Imperia 2

- **Gremlin**

Realm of the Huanting
K240 (working title)
Hardwar (working title)

- **Interplay**

Descent 2
U.S.C.F. Chess

- **Lucasarts**

Rebel Assault 2

- **Maxis**

Simcity 2000

- **Mindscape**

Warhammer

- **Origin Systems**

Wing Commander

- **Papyrus**

IndyCar Racing
NASCAR Racing

- **Sierra Online**

Aces of the Deep
Command Thexder

- **Spectrum Holobyte**

Falcon

button in the installation Wizards, you can install any piece of hardware in your PC with Windows '95.

Win '95's new device drivers have another additional benefit; they now work within any DOS sessions you may start within Windows '95. In the past it was a tricky thing to get a sound card to "co-exist" with a DOS window and other Windows applications; usually the DOS application would either be silent or refuse to load do to IRQ conflicts. Now you can launch a game or other DOS program in a window without worry.

Windows '95 now has device drivers for joysticks, allowing you to calibrate the device once instead of every time you install a new game. Windows '95 recognizes specialty devices such as the Gravis Pad and Thrustmaster FCS, and the new APIs keep the CPU processor overhead for these devices down to a minimum.

The Interface

Then of course there's the new Windows '95 graphical interface itself. Microsoft has borrowed some of the best features of the most popular interfaces; you find things that remind you of the Mac, OS/2, and UNIX's Motif scattered about. If you're a strong Windows 3.1 user and have never been exposed to other GUIs the experience may seem a bit strange but still familiar at the same time. There's no more Program Manager; it's been replaced with a "Start" button at the bottom of the screen. Press START and a quick menu pops up giving you access to your programs, system settings, or shutting down the computer. Waving the mouse over the Programs item causes another menu to "cascade" onto the screen. Since you can now have program groups within groups, it's possible that you'll have to cascade through several layers of pop-up menus just to get to a single program.

If this sounds a bit daunting you can always switch

back to using the old Win 3.1 Program Manager, but there is actually a couple of better ways to access your programs. Program Icons can be added to the Start button menu, putting any program a mere two clicks away. This is great if you have five or six programs you use constantly. For instance, I have Word, Excel, America Online, and CheckFree all on the Start menu. Programs I use less frequently, such as my video capture tools, I keep underneath the Program menus.

Another option is to create a "shortcut" on the desktop. Shortcuts are just another name for a program icon. In Windows 3.1 the only place you could create a program icon was within the Program Manager; now you can place icons anywhere on your screen giving you quick access to all of your favorite programs. Once you have programs loaded, the "task bar" at the bottom of the screen makes it easy to switch between them. Every time you load a program, a button is added to this narrow bar along the bottom of your monitor. Simply click on the button of the application you want to switch to and it will immediately be brought to the front of the desktop. The task bar makes it quicker and easier to switch between applications than the conventional Win 3.1 methods of ALT-TAB or minimizing the applications on top to find ones hiding below.

Utilities

Windows '95 includes a wealth of utilities built in that allow you to back up your data, de-fragment your hard drive for optimal performance, and integrate disk compression for additional storage capacity. **There's a "Recycle Bin" that allows you to recover any files you've may have inadvertently deleted**, and a special tool called "the Briefcase" that lets you transfer files between to computers and keep your data synchronized. The Exchange program integrates PC FAX services and your electronic mail into a single application. All of the utilities feature easy-to-use Wizards that guide you through the process and give all the applications a common look and feel. Given the quality of the utilities included, retailers should wonder what kind of market there will be for add-on utility products such as the Norton and PC Tools series. Several existing utilities for Windows 3.1, especially the ones that bypass Windows API functions and handle disk and printer access directly, won't function correctly with Windows '95 at all. Microsoft intends to publish a list of the 200-plus programs of this nature that don't run under Win '95.



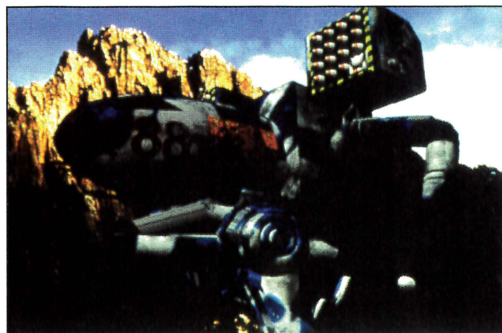
Software Support

All things considered, **Windows '95 should prove to be a boon for retailers.** The product itself will move quickly due to its exceptional Plug & Play capabilities (which will also help move more hardware upgrades)

and backward compatibility with most existing Windows 3.1 and DOS applications. Microsoft intends to have the 32-bit upgraded versions of its Office products (Word, Excel, Powerpoint) available at roll out along with Fury3, the Win '95 version

of Apogee's Terminal Velocity game. Major game developers such as LucasArts, Activision, Spectrum HoloByte, and Origin Systems are developing titles specifically for Windows '95 and believe that the new operating system will not only deliver better performance than games written for standard DOS, but will also put an end to the installation headaches

that have plagued PC gaming for years. With these kinds of benefits for consumers and retailers alike, one doesn't have to go out on much of a limb to say that Windows '95 will most likely be the PC Product of the Year for 1995. **VGA**



Windows '95: retail dream or retail nightmare?

By Sam Hamilton

Win'95 is less than 2 months away, and retailers everywhere have begun gearing up for the operating system that Microsoft says is the future. The market for Windows '95 is immense, and with competition from IBM's OS/2 and Apple's Mac OS 7.5 negligible, Microsoft is poised to take the PC Market and the retailer by storm. In fact, retailers may be the ones that Win '95 affects the most, new customers will be wondering if this new window's thing is worth the money or just a 'whole bunch of hoopla'.

Not only does Win '95 cause confusion in many aspects of the PC market, but in the videogame market as well. Microsoft has spent a lot of money to make sure that gamers everywhere know that Windows is now gamer ready and easy to use. Along with these promises come yet another gaming platform for retailers to deal with. What this means for the retailers and buyers is that they have to educate their staff about.

Win '95 could potentially be an enormously popular platform for gaming. The number of PC owners is growing in leaps and bounds, and so is the number of soon-to-be Windows '95 users. Hypothetically speaking, every PC in the world could be running Win '95 by the middle of 1996. Having said that, it's no surprise that game companies like Activision, LucasArts and Mindscape are producing quality games such as Earthworm Jim, Rebel Assault 2 and Warhammer.

Retailers may also have the most to lose in the next six months with the release of other platforms such as Sega's Saturn, Sony's PlayStation, Atari's Jag CD, 3DO's M2 and Nintendo's Ultra 64, retailers should look to Microsoft for being a consistent seller. The console gaming industry has been known to have dreadful 3rd quarters, while the PC game market is relatively strong year round. If this trend continues, Microsoft and the retailers that support them should have a very profitable alliance which may indeed help in breaking the

Christmas Season-only selling mentality.

Meanwhile, Windows does have its downfalls. Retailers are going to be forced into making tough decisions on what to support, and with only so much money to support them with, Windows may be the loser as a gaming platform. Buyers would rather spend money on the titles that are going to be hot sellers instead of a game that may or may not sell. In the beginning, Windows could very well be full of those games that are just not interesting to the PC gamer.

Microsoft has to realize that PC gamers are of a different breed of player than videogamers. PC gamers enjoy more engrossing games like *Civilizations* and *Flight Unlimited*, while console gamers are more than happy with *Mortal Kombat* and *Power Rangers*. Similarly, console games have historically done poorly as PC translations. Not only must Microsoft realize this facet, but the retailer, buyer, and developer must remember this as well. So the question remains, why produce a title that won't do

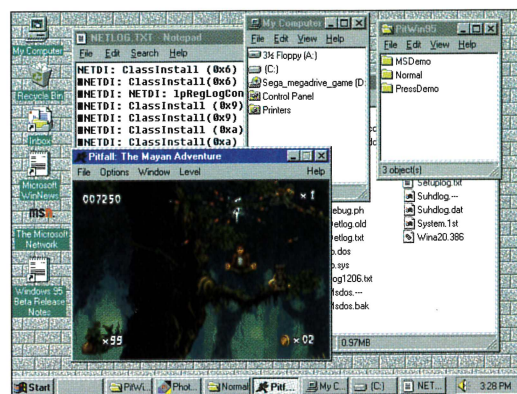
well, when you can spend the same money and resources on a good game that will sell? If Microsoft can understand this concern and educate retailers to understand their emphasis on generating a user base, then they may have a genuine winner on their hands.

Generally speaking, Microsoft's new Windows incarnation should be a retailers dream come true. When Windows is released, the technical problems that have plagued DOS for more than a decade should be extinct. The result of this will be amazing experiences at home for everyone of those millions of PC users. A new platform is being born and Microsoft is making sure that they are doing all that they can to ensure its prosperity. Windows '95's only nightmare may be in the lack of original software, however don't count on that being a major problem. When all is said and done, Microsoft has a solid contender on their hands and buyers would be wise to poise their budgets accordingly. **VGA**

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure

By Matt Harding

Activision will be bringing out one of the first videogame titles for the much-hyped Windows '95 operating system on August 28th, *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure*. VGA spoke with Scott Krager, producer of the game regarding its upcoming release on this exciting new gaming platform.



VGA: The current roster of games available for PC s consists of very few side-scrollers, and those that do exist are usually lackluster in comparison to their more advanced, console-based counterparts. Why is this, and what does Windows '95 offer to remedy that problem?

SK: One of the primary reasons many PC games that originated on consoles do not measure up to their counterparts is because the developers were unable to effectively recreate the console-based hardware routines such as sprite and background display functions. Such routines, which are not available on PCs, require game programmers to write new software as a substitute. Unfortunately, this difficult task often meets with substandard results. This is not a fault of the programmers, but rather a lack of technology and good development tools.

Because Microsoft is hoping to market Windows '95 as a competitive gaming platform in addition to an operating system, the company is committed to supporting game developers. They are creating new tools, drivers and libraries that will allow game companies to produce exceptional new Windows-based games. Additionally, the operating system itself is more conducive to developing games.

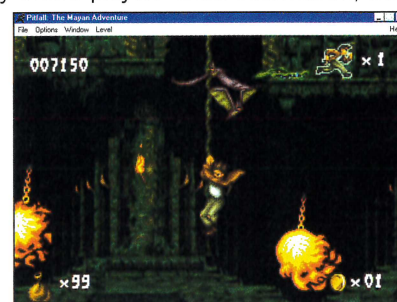
VGA: Other than the side-scrolling capabilities, what features make Windows '95 a suitable platform for games?

SK: Windows '95 includes a feature known as AutoPlay, which allows users to insert a CD game into the drive and immediately start playing directly from the disc. This 'plug and play' capability eliminates the need for lengthy and often frustrating installation procedures that, until now, have been a necessary evil.

As a result, games which use the AutoPlay feature typically require little or no hard disk space. These advantages, in combination with the above-mentioned system enhancements will undoubtedly help to attract those people who play only DOS-based games or would otherwise use Windows for business applications only.

VGA: Does the Windows '95 version of *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure* contain any enhanced features over the previous incarnations?

SK: *Pitfall: TMA* combines all of the best elements of previous versions and has been updated to take advantage of the many new Windows '95 capabilities. For example, the *Pitfall* interface is very user-friendly and includes an additional status bar that not only offers players extra information, but allows them to easily change game configurations.



VGA: *Pitfall: TMA* will obviously be one of only a few available games designed for Win '95 at its launch. How will Activision be marketing Pitfall to utilize this advantage?

SK: We will be launching a significant print advertising campaign in both trade and consumer publications. Also supporting the title is an opportunity for consumers to demo the game on Activision's web site (<http://www.activision.com>) starting at the end of July. Further, we are planning a number of major promotions including sweepstakes and cross-promotion tie-ins with retailers and other PC hardware peripheral manufacturers.

Also, Activision will be participating in all of the Windows '95 promotional activities coordinated by Microsoft. Pitfall will be featured in the 22 city Windows '95 World Tour and will be shown at the launch on August 24 in Seattle.

VGA: What are Activision's future plans regarding Win '95?

SK: Activision has worked in conjunction with Kinesoft Development to create a new Windows technology called Exodus, the engine behind *Pitfall*. This breakthrough engine will allow Activision to convert other side-scrolling console games to Win '95. Already in the early stages is *Earthworm Jim*, recently licensed by Activision from Shiny Entertainment. **VGA**

...Microsoft is
hoping to market
Windows '95 as
a competitive
gaming platform
in addition to an
operating system,
the company is
committed to sup-
porting game
developers.

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Display Marketing: It used to be easy.

By Jeff High

N

intendo, Sega, Super Nintendo, and the Sega Genesis packaging all fell within a conveniently limited spectrum of sizes and shapes that complimented associated industries, facilitating an easy add-on for retail businesses such as toy and video stores. The modest scope of the market was efficacious as well, since groupings were limited to two or three formats and did not dominate more than a fraction of available retail space. This also helped display marketing since videogames could be isolated. Customers, typically teen and pre-teen males, (and/or their parents), usually had a pre-defined sphere of genre and could be directed, without hassle, to browse to their hearts' content. Point-of-Purchase could be focused on this limited demographic with acceptable results, moderating marketing costs.

People grow, things change. With as many as twelve different formats available, videogames have now become a stand-alone retail industry. Stores are surfacing left and right that cater to this concept and most have made a spectacular showing. But it's a business unlike any other; unregulated and unstandardized. The majority of us are plodding relentlessly, making things up as we go along. Realizing this, it is not terribly surprising that a number of problems have arisen affecting everyone from buyer to stock help. **One area in particular seems to have degenerated into an uncommon problem:** gaudy packaging and exaggerated retail presentation of product. In the next few paragraphs, we will try to cover those problems as they have evolved, uncovering the reasons for them and perhaps offer a solution or two.

The whole scenario is an after-shock of one particular series of

events that began when Sega and NEC entered the home videogame race back in the 1980's. Consumers were caught up in a maelstrom of excitement over the blossoming technology that was emerging from familiar producers of arcade hits. For a brief time, you simply couldn't make a poor game and a bevy of should-have-been-stinkers chanced to belch out a profit that sent executive heads spinning. PC software designers were the worst culprits, producing games that would have been considered inferior a half-decade before, hinging every ounce of appeal on a clever or familiar title. A network of coat-tail-surfers emerged and a familiar, short-lived season where sub-standard was the status-quo, (remember the similar stomach-churning events of the late-Seventies?), skipped in and out of the market like a hiccup. To grasp the significance of this, we need to understand that despite breath-holding, industry scares, and other useless remedies, the videogame market has never quite recovered it since the first onset.

Normally, that is not a problem that would concern us. We, being sensible folk, would matter-of-factly shy from those episodes when the far-off scent of green led some manufacturer into rash furies of meaningless creation and absurd distribution. But today, the consumer has caught on to some degree, despite questionable tactics engineered to snow the public. 'Okay,' you say, 'good for them,' and nod and smile and go about your business. But the situation is far more complicated than that. The problem lies in the fact that the manufacturers in question know that the consumers have become more discerning. They have eighteen months of profit reports screaming it to them in big, clear let-

...today, the

consumer has

caught on to some

degree, despite

questionable tac-

tics engineered to

snow the public.

ters. Their answer? Guerrilla marketing. And guess what. It worked.

At least it worked well enough to stir things up again. Seldom used marketing concepts, designed to make a product or corporation stand out at nearly any cost, were implemented by many and the fish nibbled, then nipped, then gulped it hook, line and sinker. Ironically, it wasn't the sucker-punchers who set the mood. It was a few extremely successful products that snagged the customer's eye and captivated their imagination. Once a theme had been well represented, the imitators began to follow in droves, and as usual, some were good, most were destined for obscurity. The most visible of these forerunners was a spunky title that I first saw on a Macintosh computer. It was the legendary Spectre. The concept was exciting, innovative,... and so was the packaging. It was as streamlined as the three-dimensional tanks you controlled in the game. Ominous colors layered over an angular, alien design was enough to make it stand out from everything else on the shelves and its success and sequels extolled the virtues of exotic packaging. One was almost compelled to purchase the product for no other reason than the benefit of displaying the box next to one's computer. Other software companies were not slow to follow suit. Another screaming success that debuted soon after was the follow-up to the personal computer sensation, Prince of Persia. **Prince of Persia 2 was a game that could**

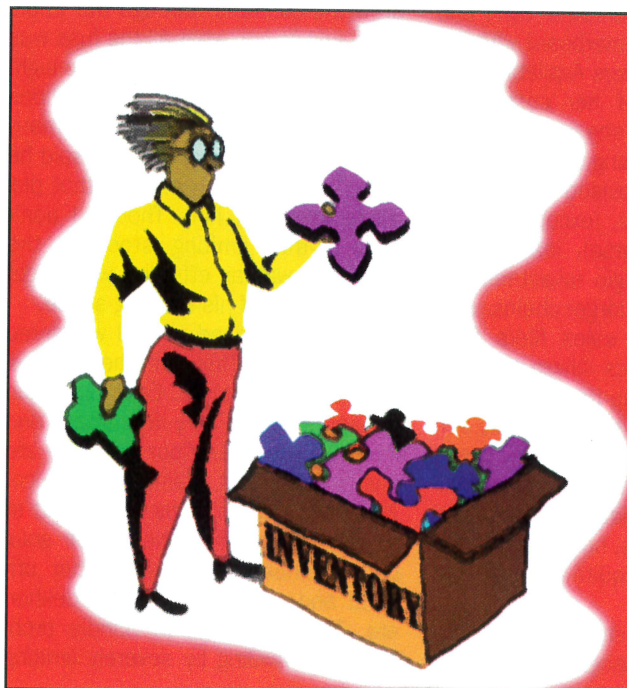
have stood on its own merit, but the packaging designers decided that a bit of flare couldn't hurt. It appeared on store shelves in an angular, dramatic box and once again the wisdom of non-conformity seemed to prevail.

Now, add to this the birth of a popular companion concept, the rebellious individuality of Generation X. With that reinforcement you seemed to have a formula for guaranteed profits. Well, to make a long story short (yeah, I know, too late), it was no such thing, but typically, nobody got off the bandwagon, even after the band packed up and went home.

So what are we left with? A cavalcade of products that stand out so much that: a) they become lost amongst themselves and all of that flamboyant packaging is just so much wind, (If any of you have noticed a marked increase in sales as a result of triangular boxes, please let me know), and b) all the other manufacturers are afraid to back down for fear of losing an advantage, which leaves us with c) retailers are stuck having to deal with the results.

The problems as they affect us and, more importantly, you as the buyer, are distinct if a bit unclear. **The unusual shapes take up a great deal of space very quickly, eating up valuable square footage.** Without an extreme impact on sales, the design becomes a liability to the retailer, taking up twice the space as conventional packaging. This will become noticeable in times to come

as PC popularity drives manufacturers to produce more and more games. Quite frankly, t'aint room in this here town for all of 'em. Whoever said bigger was better never worked retail... On top of it all, it's hard to maintain an attractive display when your shelves look like an up-ended jigsaw puzzle.



Their answer?

Guerrilla marketing.

And guess what. It

worked.

I don't mean to be leaving out the dedicated home systems either. Their problems don't arise from amplitude but from magnitude. **As I mentioned earlier, there is a potential for twelve different systems on your shelves,** meaning twelve different sections before subdividing them into categories. When was the last time you were in a store that had twelve different kinds of anything?

I spent some time these last few weeks browsing retailers to gain some insight on the real impact these situations have had on the bottom line. The results were both expected and surprising. Four of the seven smaller stores I had visited carried a very limited selection of videogames, but every one of them has plans of expansion. The single factor keeping them from immediate growth is the intimidation present in the volume of product looming ahead. They see what the market is doing and are afraid of stepping out into its path for fear of being capsize, but the fear of being left behind is pushing them closer to the edge.

One woman told me, "I don't know how I'm going to be able to compete when everybody wants a little of everything." I suggested to her that perhaps then that is what she should offer. **Purchase a bare minimum of the hottest titles for as many of the systems as her budget would allow for her in-store stock.** Then clip pictures of anything else she wanted to carry and fasten them to a posterboard with the caption 'Special Orders Available', taking fifty percent of her cost as a deposit. In this way she would be able to offer nearly anything she desired to her customers. I advised her to hold off on the hardware, (except for special orders, of course), leaving that high cost, low margin investment to some of the nearby larger chains, possibly even posting sales fliers from non-competing stores where her customers could pick up the product at a good price. It would be a fantastic service to her customers and they would remember her for it with future business. For a small video store housing two major industries, her modest shelf space will remain quite manageable as a result.

The other three stores dealt a little more heavily in videogames and had

some interesting ideas about coping with shelf space. One gentleman photocopied his boxes, cut them out and had them laminated. He then displayed those pictures on his walls with price tags. His customers simply brought the tags to him and he retrieved the games from his more efficiently stocked store room. Toys 'R Us employs much the same method, applying a long-used display arrangement for higher priced and/or bulky merchandise. They have one piece occupying retail space at a time with bar coded cards indicating the desired product and its price. The customer brings the card to the counter, is supplied with the product from a more efficient storage area, and leaves having been serviced well with a minimum of fuss. This technique has other advantages in large locations. Precious employee hours are saved from stocking in quantity with attention to detail in a pleasing display, and this type of arrangement eliminates most opportunities of external theft.

Another moderately sized store owner had an intricate marketing plan in his floor design. All of his P.O.P. was placed at the front of the store, giving it an almost cluttered appearance. According to him, it was very effective in drawing customers. He then had signs printed in sizes varying from the smallest at the near shelves to huge, colorful signs in the back. He said it drew the customer through the whole store just to see what all the fuss was about. His store was laid out into eight or more surprisingly small sections and stocked a limited supply of many of the more popular titles. He said he never bothered with product that didn't jump out at him. Though I don't believe that limiting stock is the answer, it was an effective way to get the most out of his existing space.

I was surprised when I wandered into Babages. They are the quintessential big-little store. Each operation in itself takes up very little space and most of it is open floor, yet they are one of the largest chains in existence. They didn't seem to be concerned at all with display marketing. Their solution to shelving was somewhat offhand and seemed less than deliberate. They appeared to handle problems of crowding by severely limiting

*I was surprised
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quintessential
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computer software titles and 16-Bit videogames. They had half a dozen of the newest PC software titles positioned where they hit you square between the eyes when you walked in, but after that, you were lost if you didn't know what you were looking for. I must admit, in all fairness, that they appear to be more than making up for it in helpful and friendly sales staff, I wasn't ten seconds through the door before being greeted and assisted by an enthusiastic employee.

Electronics Boutique was another target for my investigation for two reasons. They are one of the BIG THREE software dedicated chains, and where Babbages always looked empty, EB always appeared to be packed to capacity. I had a little trouble figuring them out. At first glance they seem a little haphazard in their shelving, relying almost solely on front-of-store displays as a consumer draw and letting the rest fall where they may, but they've let very little get past them. They have used every available inch of space for display shelving, cramming the home gaming systems into the front of the store and stuffing computer software everywhere else it will fit. **Their answer to the overcrowding problem is to overcrowd.** It's simple and efficient, though difficult to navigate as a customer. Perhaps that is why they always look congested.

Software Etc. is probably the most computer intensive store of

them all which is why I was most curious to see how they handled the focal problem of awkward packaging. Nearly all of their stores have excellent space management, appearing somewhat like a bookstore in layout. They've handled their inventory on a case by case basis, allocating suitable positions for each product. Near the front of the store are all the new, snazzy, eye catching software boxes in amounts of one or two in a sort of Salvador Dali-inspired display. The rest of the store is left to its traditional conservative style, compromising little.

The Bottom Line

You must contour your solutions to your business' requirements. But keep in mind, if only from example, that **display is a factor of purchasing decisions**, one that can not be counted-out in the coming months. Your stock now not only has to be balanced by quantity and profit, but by effective display marketing management. If a product is not distinctly seen and noticed, availability means nothing. Remember, if it doesn't sell it will come back to you in the end by not only flack but by desperately seeking inventory solutions. Discuss concerns with the retail employees and listen closely to what they have to say. Their insights might surprise you. Our old standards are disappearing, but we need not be left behind. Until next month...**VGA**

*Remember, if it
doesn't sell it will
come back to you
in the end*

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U.S. Neo•Geo CD ships October 1995

By Aaron Zachlod

SNK is the world's leading software developer of multi-game arcade systems, with annual corporate revenues of more than \$500 million. The 4th quarter of 1994 marked a new era in SNK's 5 year history with the release of a CD based unit. Although Neo•Geo enthusiasts have been playing their favorite MVS (Multi Video System) arcade games at home for years on the cartridge-based deck, this device makes it possible to play the same games at roughly 1/3 the cost. By encoding the data to a CD, the price of their software has dropped greatly from around \$250 to anywhere between \$49 to \$79 SRP.

This front loading machine was limited to a mere 25,000 units at launch. Within a few months following the initial release, a new top-loading design made it's way to both Japan and Europe in substantially larger quantities. Current Neo owners realized the possibilities of purchasing multiple titles for the price of a single cartridge. While interest was sparked in those who

wanted the arcade excitement, but were unable to pay the price, the excitement has mounted. In less than six months time, the Neo CD has sold more than 300,000 units.

There was only one complaint from the initial owners of this awesome hardware. A single-spin CD drive was originally adopted, causing excessive loading time which is a gaming no-no. Since then, SNK has decided to install a double-spin CD drive for the U.S. market.

Delivery of the hardware is set for October and should have an immediate library of more than 50 titles, both new and old. The system, which will retail for \$399, includes one controller and a "best-selling" software title that has yet to be announced. Our sources at SNK tell us that this title may be Samurai Shodown 2, but King of Fighter's '95 may end up as the pack-in if competed on schedule!

The current hardware configuration has remained basically the same over the course of it's existence. The Neo•Geo CD is powered

*this device makes
it possible to play
the same games
at roughly 1/3
the cost*



by the following processors:

- Motorola 68000
- Zilog Z-80
- Yamaha 2610 sound chip

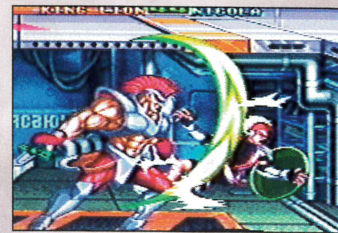
The 2610 enables the Neo to be the only console in the industry with the capability of handling PCM audio (six channels), FM synthesis (four channels), and SSG (one channel). What this means in layman's terms is that

it has the ability to play the largest array of audio soundtracks and sound effects. The CD unit is also equipped with the following:

- 7 MB DRAM
- 512 KB VRAM
- 64K SRAM
- 300 kbps CD drive (double-spin)
- 65,535 color palette (4,096 on screen)

- RGB, AV, RF and SVHS outputs

Neo•Geo CD systems and titles will be initially available through Electronics Boutique and other leading electronic and mass market retailers and wholesale distributors. **VGA**



Two of the many upcoming NEO CD fighting titles, *Savage Reign* (above) & *Fatal Fury 3* (left).



Can SNK Compete?

By Glenn Rubinstein

Unlike most manufacturers, SNK has gained experience in both the hardware and software ends of videogame development. From their start as an arcade powerhouse to their turn as one of the best Nintendo licensees (with games for the 8-Bit Nintendo like *Baseball Stars*), to their evolution into being the first company to enter high-end next generation gaming with their Neo•Geo system, to their reign again as a strong arcade force, (with games like *Samurai Shodown*). So what's next for this company? Surprisingly, SNK is taking another chance on the Neo•Geo, and re-focusing some of their energy on the retail market with the launch of the US Neo•Geo CD this October.

Priced at \$399, with an initial software library of 50+ games, the Neo•Geo CD makes a lot of sense. It isn't a Saturn or even a 3DO, maybe it's a Jaguar, actually, in some ways it looks better on paper than all three. The library has been building for some time while SNK has continued to support the original Neo•Geo, and taking these games to the CD medium isn't that difficult of a task. With new titles like *Fatal Fury 3* and *Samurai Shodown 2* heading for this platform exclusively, there is a new attraction.

Additionally, this is the same hardware that is in the Neo•Geo's arcade system, so these aren't translations, but rather direct conversions.

The system incorporates the original Neo•Geo's custom hardware, along with a double speed CD-ROM drive. Apparently the system works (see attached sidebar) but the real question most people are asking is "why now?" and "how?" For these answers we spoke to SNK's Vice President of Marketing, Bruce Tomiyama.

"We're not trying to compete with Sega and Nintendo," said Bruce in an interview by phone, "we are going after a niche of hard-core game players." True, with SNK supposedly putting 50 million dollars of marketing worldwide into their strategy they cannot go after the average passive videogame player, but the idea of a system for dedicated players who will spend \$400 on a system sounds a little far fetched. "We sold a lot of systems to the hard-core game player market when we were near the \$500 market," says Bruce, "and now with the growth of the industry, the drop in our price, and the increase in the amount of software titles we have available we think we can keep this going and keep producing great games for our system."

On the software side, SNK does produce a good amount of games each year, and hits like *Samurai Shodown* and *Fatal Fury 2* have been successful in their translations to other home systems. One might wonder though if these niche games will be enough to fuel a new system. "We are one of the leaders in the arcade game market, consistently putting out hit games. The fact that these games will only be available, in identical form on our system, we think adds an attraction the hard-core game player."

The system is set to launch in October, and things could potentially go either way. But with some good marketing, retailer support and a steadily growing game library, SNK could give the hard-core game playing market a real treat. The true destiny of the system will lay almost exclusively in the hands of the sales and marketing staff of SNK's american division. The hardware is in place, the software line-up is enormous and the price point has dropped... significantly. Look for a follow-up story on the launch of this system once budgets have been set by and funds allocated. In the interim, don't exclude the Neo CD from your shelves just yet. **VGA**

A Guide to the VGA Web Page

By Matt Harding

In recent months, the World Wide Web has become a focal point of that undefinable cliché that some of us call the information superhighway. It has sparked interest among businesses by finally offering a place where companies eager to stake their claim can set up a site and start figuring out how the heck they're going to "make money on the Internet." While pulling this task off may still be rather difficult, putting up a site where users can access information about a company is relatively easy. In fact, the buzz question in the videogame industry has quickly turned from "Have you heard of this Web thing?", to "Do you have your web site up yet?"

So of course Videogame Advisor, never one to be left in the dust, is now preparing VGA magazine to become a full-blown Internet periodical. The capabilities of the Web offer us a bold new environment to present information that is as up to date as possible, conveniently organized, and filled with added bonuses to enhance our presentation. **The Web is now estimated to double in both total size and number of users every one or two months.** With this rapidly growing user base, we will be able to offer industry news, product reviews, and editorial to a vast number of our readers, in a far more thorough and timely manner than would have ever before been possible in the past. The following, is a brief synopsis of what

readers can expect from the Cyberactive Publishing/Videogame Advisor web site.

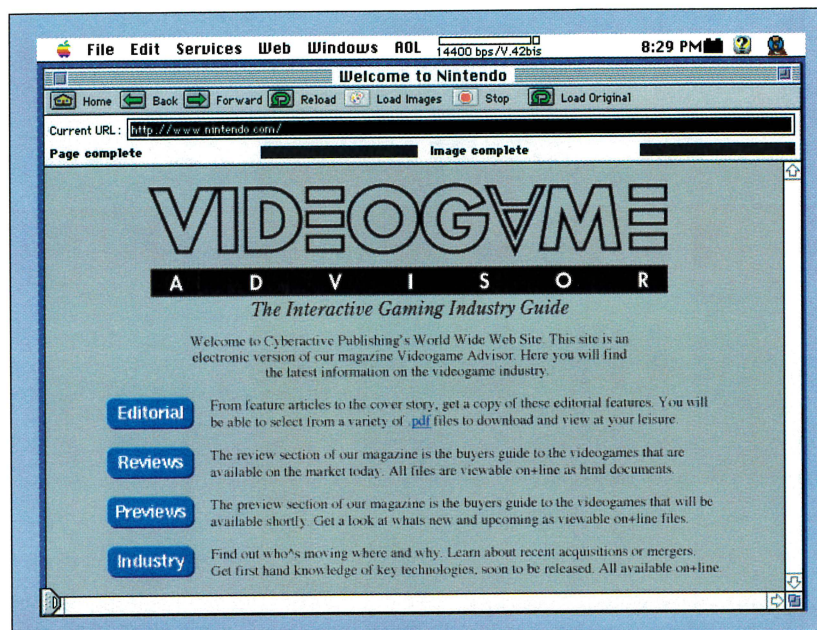
Home Page

This is the main directory and brochure for the magazine. The home page acts as both a cover and an interactive Table of Contents. Users will be able to go straight to the feature articles, and the four major sections of the magazine by simply 'pointing-and-clicking' the mouse on the topic of interest using one of the Web's most popular features: hyperlinks. These links appear on the pages as clickable images or blocks of text. On selection, hyperlinks instruct the computer to call up a new address that contains the requested information.

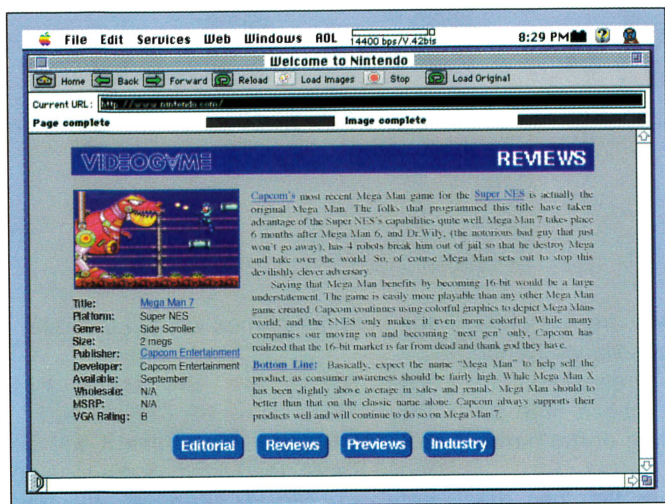
Feature Articles

The Feature articles can be selected from the home page, and are downloaded to users' hard drives as PDF files. The files can then be viewed

*The capabilities
of the Web offer
us a bold new
environment
to present
information*



**Videogame
Advisor's mock-up
world wide web
site (development
version). Home
page pictured.**



Videogame Advisor's mock-up world wide webb site (development version). Review page pictured.

off-line by the user with the help of a shareware viewing utility called Adobe Acrobat Reader (which can be downloaded for free on Adobe's Web site). Viewing these files on the desktop rather than while on-line will spare users the annoyance of paying for service connect-time and allow them to read and print-out the articles in a leisurely fashion. The articles themselves will be virtually identical to their appearance in the printed version of the magazine.

VGI News

The Videogame Industry news will appear as a series of small text blocks, containing news of recent events as they occur. They will be stored as HTML documents, meaning that they can be viewed while on-line. **This will be one of the most rapidly changing sections of the magazine**, updated on a daily basis with small, densely packed bites of information on important industry events.

Departments

The Departments are where we put the topic-oriented editorial sections, like Bit-Wars, Cutting Edge, and On-Line Reports (the section you're reading now). These articles will also be available as PDF files, similar to the features, and will remain focused on specific categories like the internet and emerging technologies.

Reviews

The Review section is a straight-forward breakdown of what new titles will and won't sell on their respective platforms. The reviews are given from a buyer's perspective, taking a products marketing and reputation into full consideration before determining an honest rating for its sales

potential. This is one of the magazine's most valued features, and will continue to be so in its new format.

There will be several enhancements to the Review section that will increase the timeliness, efficiency and thoroughness of reviews. The first will be an index of all titles, which will classify releases according to their platform. Buyers will be able to select which reviews they want to read by checking this index for genre, release date, publisher and so on. The second enhancement will be the flexible nature of the Web site, allowing the VGA reviews to be stripped into their appropriate sections within days of being received at the office, giving the editorial a significant lead ahead of product release dates and consumer print magazines. Buyers who must fill out purchase orders well before the products hit shelves will no longer have to wait for the print magazines to complete their lead times of several weeks or more. Users will also have access to archived reviews from previous months, providing a reference database of products already out on shelves. And finally, we will be able to include downloadable video clips for many titles being reviewed. Hyperlinks will be placed into the reviews with short, compressed video clips of game play.

Previews

Similar to the Review section, the Previews will inform buyers on what titles are coming out in the months ahead. The Previews will objectively present what is known about the product, and give the reader a feel for the title. As with the Review section, users will be able to select titles to view by checking a directory that breaks all releases down by platform. Previews will remain on the site up until the point when they are replaced by a new review. When a preview is replaced, one will still be able to look in the archives for reference.

The Videogame Advisor Web site will be a comprehensive and valuable tool for the retail videogame buyer, keeping users up to date with upcoming releases and well-informed with unbiased perspectives on the industry. An early version of the site should be up by the time you're reading this article, and a full version will be running by September 1st. **VGA**

There will be several enhancements to the Review section

An early version of the site should be up by the time you're reading this article...

Interviewing the Big Guys

By Glenn Rubenstein

At the E3 in LA, everyone was talking about the new hardware platforms coming into the market, the viability of the platforms currently in the market, and the general future of this industry. Amidst all the speculation, rumor, and unconfirmed information, we got a chance to sit down with the heads of the five companies that, through their hardware platforms (and the software on those platforms) will shape the future of this industry. (Part 5 of 5)



Steve Race, Sony:

VGA: What is your current position in the "next generation" marketplace?

SR: Well, we are about to introduce the Sony Playstation which is going to be debuted in North America on September 8th of this year. We'll introduce it with about 20 to 28 titles and we should have 50 to 60 titles out by Christmas time. We have signed up 160 licensees domestically, with a little over 400 worldwide. Anyone that is anyone has licensed the product. When we launch the first 20-25 titles, about half will be first party (Sony) titles and the other half will be third party. We're positioned as the best performing, lowest priced, "next generation" system.

VGA: What is your biggest asset?:

SR: Clearly I can't identify one, there are a couple that I would point to. One is the name, Sony, it is one of the most revered and trusted names around. We're number one or number two in every industry we are in. Our

Trinitron television sets are the pride of the industry, we have Mariah Carey, Billy Joel and Barbara Streisand on our record label, and we had a little bit over a 20 percent share of the movie box office last year.

Sony is a company that has the technology inherent in it, we're not going outside to "graft the technology on" like some of our competitors. In addition, I believe we have superior games by superior third parties.

VGA: What is the biggest challenge you face?

SR: We're new to the industry. When you talk to people and ask them who is going to bring out the "next generation" platforms, and we have done a lot of consumer research, Sega and Nintendo are the first names off of their lips. But when we probe a little more, Sony is the next name, but we are not known for video games. I think we have great permission to be a successful video game company and to blend hardware and software. But our biggest challenge is to let the consumer know that Sony is here, we have got the system and we're here for keeps.

VGA: Where do you see Sony being in a year?

SR: We will be the clear leader, the clear leader.

VGA: What do you think will draw the industry towards embracing Sony as the leader?

SR: This is a company with a heritage of bringing out consumer products and products that the consumer wants. I think at the end of the day the consumers will embrace us in part because of our name, in part because of our price, and in part because of our software. To a large part because of the software. We will bring the best games to market, either on a shared basis or exclusively. We will have a lot of exclusive titles- Tekken is exclusive, Toshinden is exclusive, Mortal Kombat III for the first six or seven months is exclusive to us on the "next generation" systems. At the end of the day, I think

the superior games will tell the tale.

VGA: What are the three hot Playstation titles for Christmas?

SR: On Playstation, I think it will be Ridge Racer, Toshinden, and a toss-up between Mortal Kombat III and Tekken.

VGA: Let's look at your competition, starting with Nintendo.

SR: I view Nintendo with a great deal of relief that they didn't come into the market this Christmas. They clearly have a heritage in this industry and a cash position that is truly enviable with 3 billion dollars in cash with no place to go. Yet their technology seems to be somewhat at risk, this is one of those companies that is trying to "graft on" the technology, this time going to Silicon Graphics. Thus far that marriage has not seemed to work, I would not bet against it in the long run but it hasn't worked so far. Rather curiously, they continue to stick to this cartridge based format which in days of justifying inventory and lower costed product and media seems curious to us. It's odd, they're sticking to what has been successful for them in the past from a consumer standpoint, but from a retailer standpoint it is quite curious. Their ability to add-on a CD drive remains to be seen.

VGA: Sega.

SR: Sega clearly has a heritage in the gaming industry, I think if you pull the two products (Saturn and Playstation), clearly we have an interest, but if you look even in some of the gaming magazines, their words, not mine- "The Sony system is a beautiful piece of work, and the Saturn system is a mess." Their words, "a mess." I think that speaks a lot about a company that has a heritage in technology versus a company that doesn't. Ours was designed from the ground up, theirs wasn't. Theirs is a virtual shopping basket. They're using chips from appliances found around the house, they are also not subject to the same price learning curves that we are. At the end of the day they will be a strong com-

petitor, but I am still a bit curious as to why they brought the product out now, in May, when we go into the doldrums of the sales cycle and summer is not the time to introduce consumer products at retail. It's a very slow retail time. It's also hard to get eyeballs in front of the tv during the summer. It's hard to tell, Nintendo is unclear when their product will come out, Sega has theirs out, so clearly we will not be the first. So while we will not be the earliest or the first "next generation" system out there, nonetheless we think we will be the best.

VGA: 3DO.

SR: 3DO, uh, the M2 product, the "Bulldog" sounds like a very interesting product. No one has built one so no one has any idea what the costs are, everyone is talking specsman-ship. It's easier to talk specs, let's see the silicon. We have not seen silicon produced by them yet. The model does not seem to work from a business standpoint or a consumer standpoint. They have been out several years now, their installed base on a worldwide basis by even generous estimates is well below half a million units. They appear to have a library that is quite extensive, something in excess of 140 titles, which the consumer has simply not embraced. Is it the price of the machine? Has it been the software? Is it the capabilities of the machine? Tough to tell, but it has not been embraced by the consumer.

VGA: Atari.

SR: Eh, Atari. Seems to be out there with a product that while quoted as a 64-bit system is not a 64-bit system or architecture. Again, they certainly have the right price point but the lack of software is killing them in the marketplace.

VGA: Where do you see the industry heading?

SR: I think there will be a shake out. It is not at all clear to me that five or more systems will exist in the future. Clearly we are on the downside of the 16-Bit cycle and we are on the uptake of the "next generation" systems. I think the "next generation" systems will prevail and supplant 16-Bit, just like 16-Bit supplanted 8-Bit. At the end of the day it remains to be seen who is going to win and who is going to lose. We have a clear opinion as to who is going to win. But I think it is going to be an epic battle as we go through here. We've got 3 very big competitors with a lot of cash who are

going to keep the heat increasing. I see some consolidation on the hardware side, and perhaps even more on the software side I think an eventual winner will emerge.

VGA: If you could, summarize Sony's plans for the coming months.

SR: We're launching the product September 8th, one week after back-to-school/Labor Day weekend. We will heavily support the launch with television and in promotional areas. We'll be doing a lot of promotions with our sister companies, with our music company, or in trailers on Columbia/TriStar home videos, in Sony Theaters you'll be able to play the Playstation hands on while waiting for a movie. One of the big things we are trying to do in the next six to eight months is to get the product into the consumers' hands, because once they play the Playstation the difference is fairly obvious.

VGA: What message is Sony trying to send?

SR: I think we're trying to tell the consumer we're here. We've got the system, we've got the software, we've got the commitment, we're here to stay. This is a legitimate industry, it's a 5 billion dollar industry. By a variety of people's estimates it is an industry that will explode between now and the turn of the century, and it's an active industry that Sony wants to participate in. This is the first time within Sony, through Sony Computer Entertainment, that we have put hardware and software together into the same company.

VGA: Who is your target audience?

SR: Typically it's 12-24, we will skew initially older towards the early adopter. The average would be a 17 year old boy, but everyone in some ways is 17 when they are playing a video game.

VGA: Who is your main competitor?

SR: Clearly today it is Sega, Nintendo has withdrawn from the market of "next generation" systems until from what they are saying is April, and that is the minimum. Sega is our immediate competitor. PC's are somewhat of a competitor, but I don't see 16-Bit as much of a competitor.

VGA: If you could, give us your long-term prospective on the industry.

SR: In the long term what I see for video games in general is that we're going to see more interactivity and networking where a kid in Pittsburgh, California can play against a kid in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I think we'll see more interesting distribution alternatives, more and more subversive games, and much more cinematic games. We're requiring consumers to suspend belief a lot less on these "next generation" systems.

VGA: Sony is being new to the industry is being hazed by a lot of people. How do you respond to your critics?

SR: Clearly we are new to the video game industry, but this is an industry that is only twenty years old, it's a relatively young industry so it's hard to have much of a heritage in anything in twenty years. Sony has a long and proud history in consumer products on both the hardware and software side, be it music, movies, televisions, or Walkman where we have sold 120 million units. Look at a company like Id from a small town in Texas about as far away from Silicon Valley as you can get and they make great games with no built-in heritage, so it proves anyone can do it. Finally, it's in the product, take a look at what we have on Playstation and it is hard to say we don't have the best games on the floor. Heritage is one thing, games are another, and these are going to be great games that take advantage of our system. This is not "Mad Dog McGree." These are brand new games, software that uses the technology. Also, these are first generation games- take a look at the first 16-Bit games, then look at Donkey Kong Country, we expect to experience the same type of learning curve.

VGA: Do you have anything to add?

SR: Wait. The product's gonna be in September, like the song says, "See you in September!" It is definitely going to be worth the wait. **VGA**





A One of the best selling games for that particular platform. Great sound, graphics, playability, etc. This title will literally grow wings and fly off the shelves of any retail/rental store.

B A great game that is just lacking in some areas. It will sell well and bring in the masses, but just not to the extent of an "A" title. Retailers should make sure to buy this product deep enough to satisfy their individual store demands with some to spare.

C A good game that will sell about 'average' in terms of sales. It is lacking in a few departments, therefore not worthy of a "B" rating. However, this is still a quality product.

D A game that is unsupported by the manufacturer, lacking in quality and generally should have stayed in development longer. This category may rent occasionally but will not sell well to anyone other than a 'platform fan'. Poor gameplay, bad plot and just better than an "F" rating.

F A product that never should have been considered, much less released. This is a thoroughly unimpressive title that will only become an inventory nightmare. Only at drastically discounted prices could this category sell.



As a courtesy to those readers who use our magazine as a guide in making purchasing decisions for their stores, we have made our review section as up-front and honest as possible. Our ratings system is held to a very high standard. We believe that maintaining our credibility is of the utmost importance to our audience. And for that reason, we use a full spectrum of grading levels to determine ratings. We also take into account the manufacturers retail support program in the final determination of the rating given.



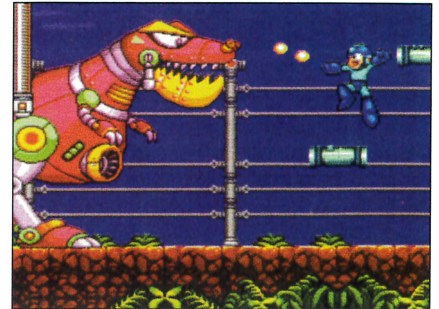
Title: Civilizations
Platform: Super NES
Genre: Strategy/Simulation
Size: 1.5 MB
Publisher: Asmic Software
Developer: Koei
Available: October
Wholesale: \$40.00
SRP: \$59.95
VGA Rating: B+

Civilizations, one of the greatest strategy games ever designed, is coming to the Super NES in early October. The title brings with it an incredible reputation, as well as a lucrative sales history on the PC. Furthermore, it will be released by Koei, a company as well known for their expertise in strategy and role-playing games as for their loyal customers. Finally, favorable reviews and decent advertising should spark consumer interest.

The game itself remains true to the standard its PC counterpart set. The mediocre graphics and sound are easily compensated for by the engrossing gameplay and depth, and the game even supports the Super NES mouse for easy control. Perhaps the only real negatives will be the games own competition on the PC and a lack of marketing on the part of the manufacturer. *CivNET*, an enhanced, networked version of the original will be available soon, and the original sells for slightly cheaper than the Super NES version's suggested retail price.

Bottom Line: This title is a strategist's dream come true. Expect good sales and excellent rentals to make this title a winner in both categories – a true feat in this genre.

– Brian Dobbins



Title: Mega Man 7
Platform: Super NES
Genre: Side Scroller
Size: 2 MB
Publisher: Capcom Entertainment
Developer: Capcom Entertainment
Available: September
Wholesale: \$45.95
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: B-

Capcom's most recent *Mega Man* game for the Super NES is actually the original *Mega Man*. The folks that programmed this title have taken advantage of the Super NES's capabilities quite well. *Mega Man 7* takes place 6 months after *Mega Man 6*, and Dr. Wily, (the notorious bad guy that just won't go away), has 4 robots break him out of jail so that he can destroy Mega and take over the world. So, of course *Mega Man* sets out to stop this devilishly clever adversary.

Saying that *Mega Man* benefits by becoming 16-bit would be a large understatement. The game is easily more playable than any other *Mega Man* game created. Capcom continues using colorful graphics to depict *Mega Man*'s world, and the SNES only makes it even more colorful. While many companies are moving on and becoming 'next gen' only, Capcom has realized that the 16-bit market is far from dead.

Bottom Line: Basically, expect the name "Mega Man" to help sell the product, as consumer awareness should be fairly high. While "Mega Man X" has been slightly above average in sales and rentals. *Mega Man* should do better than that on the classic name alone. Capcom always supports their products well and will continue to do so on *Mega Man 7*.

– Sam Hamilton



Title: Killer Instinct
Platform: SNES
Genre: Fighting
Size: 4 MB
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare Productions, Inc.
Available: August
Wholesale: \$61.00
SRP: \$69.95
VGA Rating: A

While other videogame companies such as Sega and Sony continue to devote their time and attention to their next-generation platforms, Nintendo has opted to further support its 16-bit SNES platform, pushing the limits of the system, thereby keeping their 16-bit market alive. Killer Instinct is such a game.

The arcade smash of last fall is now available on the SNES, and its 3D-rendered characters, professional soundtrack, and excellent play control make you wonder whether you are really playing the game on a four-year-old system. The game is an excellent arcade translation, staying faithful to all the moves and multiple-hit combos of the arcade. Players should flock to this game through the fall and well into the Christmas season.

The vast experience of Nintendo's in-house marketing and sales staffs will provide additional support to a title that truly doesn't need much help. Coverage in consumer magazines has been great, thanks to their P.R. efforts and on-line services and the internet buzz incessantly about this title. Expect it to be one of the biggest titles this season.

Bottom Line: KI is one of Nintendo's babies for the Christmas season. A \$20 million ad campaign added to the unprecedented success of the arcade game will make this one of the hottest titles for fourth quarter.

— Gregory Angelo



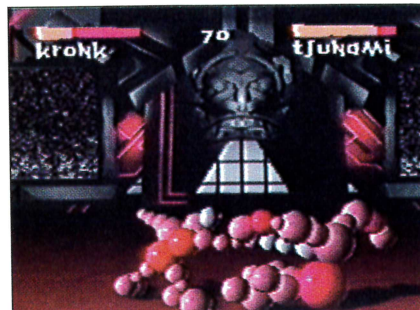
Title: Super Sidekicks 3
Platform: Neo CD
Genre: Soccer
Size: CD
Publisher: SNK
Developer: SNK
Available: October
Wholesale: N/A
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: B

The Next Glory is the third, and the best, installment in SNK's *Super Sidekicks* series. Soccer fans may challenge the World Title by choosing one of sixty-four teams from five different areas around the globe. Incorporating real World teams and their athletes, players can try to dominate a total of six tournaments. All of the rules of soccer apply including fouls, corner kicks and goal kicks. When players are hurt, their performance is actually affected.

The gameplay takes place in a side scrolling environment. The actual playing field consists of numerous line scrolls that produce a realistic 3D landscape. As players get closer to the camera they become larger creating the true perspective. The animations are fluid as are the scaling effects produced by the virtual camera. During a "chance" shot, the player is granted a first person view of the goal that he/she needs to pierce.

Bottom Line: "The Next Glory" is "Super Sidekicks" at it's finest. Not only is the overall gameplay great attribute, but the fact that I'm not throwing fireballs at someone pleases me immensely. Both soccer and sports fans in general will appreciate this title for it's attention to detail. This title should sell well and rent even better. Sports titles have a longer shelf life than most other genre's.

— Aaron Zachlod



Title: Ballz: Director's Cut
Platform: 3DO
Genre: Fighting
Size: CD
Publisher: Panasonic
Developer: PF. Magic
Available: September
Wholesale: \$46.00
MSRP: \$59.95
VGA Rating: C+

Ballz made its initial debut last Christmas for the SNES and Genesis platforms, amazing many with its outstanding graphics and unique approach to the fighting game genre. Now, *Ballz* makes the jump from the 16-bit to the 32-bit platform with *Ballz: Director's Cut* for the 3DO.

Ballz for the 3DO features much smoother camera rotation around the fighters during play, as well as more moves per character, including super power-draining special attacks. Another feature of *Ballz: Director's Cut* is the addition of "boss characters," special hidden characters that will earn you a special bonus if you can defeat them all.

However, these additional features are simply not enough to separate *Ballz* distinctly from its 16-bit counterparts. The character animations, though lifelike, do not improve drastically from the animations seen in the SNES and Genesis games. One advantage that this title does have is its name recognition from the previous platforms. 3DO customers who went without this title last season may well have rented or played a friend's game by this time.

Bottom Line: "Ballz" was an underrated game for the SNES and Genesis systems, and, consequently, did not sell extremely well on either system. This is another example of a game which should sell better in theory than in practice. Our recommendation is to use your sales and rentals for the 16-bit systems to gauge the amount you should purchase for the 3DO version.

— Greg Angelo



Title: Space Hulk
Platform: 3DO
Genre: 3D Shooter
Size: CD
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Key Game
Available: August
Wholesale: \$39.50
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: B-

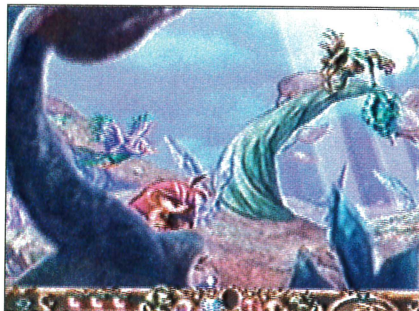
The 3DO market is going to be crowded with 3D shooters in the months ahead: *Doom*, *PO'ed*, *Killing Time*, and *Space Hulk*, which is loosely based on an IBM PC game released in 1993, which in turn was loosely based on a boardgame called Warhammer 40,000.

Space Hulk casts the player as the commander of a semi-sane group of Space Marines known as Terminators. The Terminators wear massive armored suits equipped with Storm Bolters, Lightning Claws, and other dramatically named weaponry. They need all these powerful weapons to fight the Genestealers, an evil alien race that lives in deserted and obsolete spacecraft known as Space Hulks, (hence the title).

I really should mention that the 3DO version of *Space Hulk* is VERY loosely based on the PC version. The graphics have been hopped up to gorgeous levels of detail, and the sound effects have been spiced up with sound bites uttered by the Terminators as they acknowledge their orders and carry out their missions. (They also scream bloody loud.)

Bottom Line: "*Space Hulk*" is a very good game, but it has some very strong competition in the 3DO market. EA's talented marketing arm would do well to take this title under their proverbial wing. The PC version of "*Space Hulk*" didn't take the world by storm, but had a dedicated cult following. Look for something similar with the 3DO version, with the fans of the game liking it to an obsessive degree, while most everyone else says "Dude, it's just a game!"

— Zach Meston



Title: Astal
Platform: Saturn
Genre: Action/Adventure
Size: CD
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega
Available: September
Wholesale: \$40.00
MSRP: \$49.99
VGA Rating: B

Sega is beginning to show the true potential of their Saturn system with games like *Bug!* and *Panzer Dragoon*, and continues to exhibit the power of their 32-bit machine with *Astal*, a fairy tale-like side-scroller which features a good story and some excellent special effects.

In the game, you play a mythical being who was once a great warrior and protector of the world, wrongly banished from paradise because of his ruthless actions in protection of his love, Lida. As *Astal*, the player must overcome the evil in paradise and redeem yourself once and for all.

Astal features some very impressive visual effects on the Saturn system. An extremely broad palette of colors is used, adding to the smooth, cartoon-like appearance of the game. Character animations are excellent, and special effects such as scaling and rotation are used to make the two-dimensional side scroller more of a three-dimensional experience.

Bottom Line: "*Astal*" is an impressive game throughout. Expect it to sell fairly well, especially when taking into account the fact that the game has the advertising muscle of Sega behind it and is one of the few Saturn games available on the market.

— Gregory Angelo



Title: Black Fire
Platform: Saturn
Genre: Flying/Shooter
Size: CD
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Nova Logic
Available: September
Wholesale: \$40.00
MSRP: \$59.99
VGA Rating: C

Throughout the long history of helicopter war simulation games, there is one rule that has proven to be true. Either a game is extremely realistic and detailed, or it is fun enough that you don't question why your ship is armed with 400 missiles and limitless ammo. Any title that neither attains the necessary level of accuracy, nor serves up sufficiently ridiculous explosions on a frequent enough basis, is doomed to sit on shelves indefinitely. Unfortunately, Sega's *Black Fire* is unable to occupy either of the aforementioned categories.

The game forfeits all possibility of contending as a genuine simulation by filling each mission with enough enemy vehicles to outfit a global super-power's military. However targeting and destroying these enemies feels more like playing dodge-ball on a recently waxed floor than destroying multi-million dollar equipment. The ground textures look similar to EA's *ShockWave*, and the helicopters are all polygon-based as would be expected from the Saturn, but *Black Fire* simply isn't as much fun as it could be - considering the Saturn's capabilities.

Bottom Line: The game play is similar to "*AH-3 Thunderstrike*", one of the few successful Sega CD titles. But the stakes have risen over the last two years, and it is unlikely that many consumers will take notice of this game. Being among the few launch titles in September may help in terms of rentals and sales. Although Nova Logic is hardly known for being a large marketing-driven company, Sega's force may well cover for this transgression.

— Matt Harding



Title: Jaguar CD
Platform: Jaguar
Genre: Platform
Size: N/A
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Atari
Available: August
Wholesale: \$127.50
MSRP: \$149.99
VGA Rating: C+

Atari's disgruntled niche market has been awaiting the release of their CD-based attachment for some time now. The Jaguar CD is a relatively inexpensive expansion to the existing Jag hardware. The unit attaches snugly into the cartridge port and incorporates a flip-top lid for easy access to the CD's themselves. The unit will include the Virtual Light Machine built into the hardware, which displays kaleidoscopic light patterns that fluctuate with the ever changing sound frequency from music CD's.

Packed-in software will include *Vid-Grid*, the *Tempest 2000* soundtrack on CD and the not-so-hot *Blue Lightning*. Upcoming software that we've seen shows a lot of promise and will definitely be accepted into the relatively small Jaguar community. Though the CD unit may not sell systems, it will do well among current Jag owners. With the recent price drop of the Jaguar hardware, expect sales to slowly increase toward the holiday season, as the pending launch of the CD add-on will again spur some enthusiasm.

Bottom Line: The Jaguar CD shows potential at the \$149.99 price point, though Atari's marketing reputation has left something to be desired in the past. The 'new' marketing focus of Atari is yet to be determined and could easily sway some additional sales. The end result is: great price, great software, but average sales within it's user base.

— Aaron Zachlod



Title: Power Drive Rally
Platform: Jaguar
Genre: Racing/Isometric
Size: 2MB
Publisher: Time Warner Int.
Developer: Time Warner Int.
Available: August
Wholesale: \$44.95
MSRP: \$54.95
VGA Rating: A-

After a long stretch of way below average games on the Jaguar, Time Warner is finally breaking the system's losing streak with the first genuinely good title since its brief hay-day of *Alien vs. Predator* and *Doom*. *Power Drive Rally* is an isometric racing game, similar to the recent *Great 1000 Mile Rally* in arcades. The driving is viewed at an off-set overhead angle of about 45 degrees. There have been a string of disastrous racing games on the Jaguar, and the relative excellence of this game will, no doubt, increase its sales.

Players can choose from six different cars, and race them through over thirty tracks. The simulated weather conditions cover the whole gambit of climates, and the resultant effects on driving and handling are more than a little noticeable. The lighting effects are excellent, with finely-tuned details like object shadowing and even brake lights. The cars must be carefully maintained throughout the racing circuit, and players can save their games as they move through the ranks. It isn't *Ridge Racer*, but it'll do.

Bottom Line: "Power Drive Rally" will not sell any systems, but it will keep disgruntled Jaguar owners from throwing their systems out the window for at least the next few months. This is one of the handful of Jaguar titles thus far, that have truly been worth owning.

— Matt Harding



Title: PANTSsylvania
Platform: Mac CD
Genre: Edutainment
Size: CD
Publisher: Headbone Interactive
Developer: Headbone Interactive
Available: August
Wholesale: \$34.95
MSRP: \$49.95
VGA Rating: B

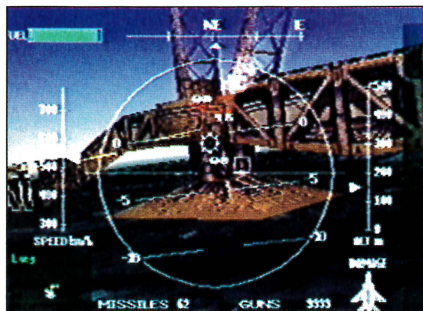
Headbone Interactive is out in full force this summer with the release of their Giggglebone Gang series of edutainment titles which include *Alpha Bonk Farm*, and the upcoming *PANTSsylvania*. This latest venture follows in the same tradition as its predecessor, featuring a friendly graphic interface for its young target audience and loading it with pictures, games, and puzzles.

The game itself uses the CD format to allow for hundreds of lines of dialogue and animations. Almost everything on the screen can be clicked to achieve some new and fun result which increases this title's sale-ability. The interface is easy for any child to use, and, should you get stuck while exploring the land of *PANTSsylvania*, a member of the Giggglebone gang will soon pop up on the screen and offer some help.

Parents may also be glad to know that *PANTSsylvania* improves upon its predecessors in the series, with games and interactive learning puzzles which cover such varied concepts as geography, the alphabet, and home economics.

Bottom Line: "PANTSsylvania" is a good edutainment title for younger children. Stock it as you would any other solid title of this genre. If your Giggglebone-type games are selling exceptionally well, or your entry into edutainment has been successful, you may consider placing a larger order for this latest installment.

— Gregory Angelo



Title: Ace Combat
Platform: PSX (Japan)
Genre: Flight Sim/Combat
Size: CD
Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Available: Now (Import)
Wholesale: \$80.00
SRP: \$109.95
VGA Rating: A-

Namco has already made quite an impression on the videogame industry within the past few months. The release of titles like *Ridge Racer*, *Tekken* and now *Ace Combat* for the Sony PlayStation have set new standards for graphics, sound and gameplay. Their latest release, *Ace Combat*, allows arm chair pilots to fly a collection of military jet aircraft in increasingly difficult missions. Each of these missions consist of air-to-air and air-to-ground scenarios in a 3D environment. Each aircraft possesses the attributes of its real-life counterpart, broken down into maneuverability, firepower, etc.. Once a mission is completed, the pilot may use reward money to hire wing-men or actually purchase a new plane.

Once again, Namco's programming prowess shines through with incredible graphics, and control to match. Each plane, including the pilot's, are texture mapped polygons that scale flawlessly during battle. The control is perfect, although I must admit that I haven't piloted a MIG recently. A two player spilt-screen option makes for hours of head-to-head action with sixteen planes to choose from.

Bottom Line: Expect import sales to match those of "Tekken", "Toshinden", and other 'big name' titles. Its US release should appear right around the PlayStation's launch this September. This is yet another 'must own' title.

— Aaron Zachlod



Title: Mobile Suit Gundam
Platform: PSX (Japan)
Genre: 3D Shooter
Size: CD
Publisher: Bandai
Developer: Sotsu Agency
Available: Now (Import)
Wholesale: \$79.00
SRP: \$85.00
VGA Rating: C

In one form or another, the popular Japanese anime, *Gundam*, has graced the videogame market, mostly as a side-scrolling adventure on the Super Famicom. The premise of these games being the ability to control a large "mech", or robot, capable of engaging the enemy while sustaining minimal amounts of damage to itself. A little far fetched, but exciting nonetheless.

This time around, *Gundam* is offered on Sony's hardware as a first person shooter. The "mech" does battle on land, sea and even space. Weapons include rapid fire guns, missiles and a sword for close-up attacks. While the motion comes across as somewhat choppy, this title is still worthy of some play time. Beyond the game itself, incredible CG cinematics set up each mission as the story line unfolds.

Bottom Line: Although the cinematics are astounding, the PlayStation is capable of better control and game play. Titles like this have usually gone over well with fans of their anime counterparts, but gamers should know that the PlayStation has a lot more to offer. "Mobile Suit Gundam" will probably never see these shores as a domestic release, which is not a bad thing. Order only when necessary as "MSG" will only appeal to the niche of hard-core anime fans and PlayStation owners.

— Aaron Zachlod



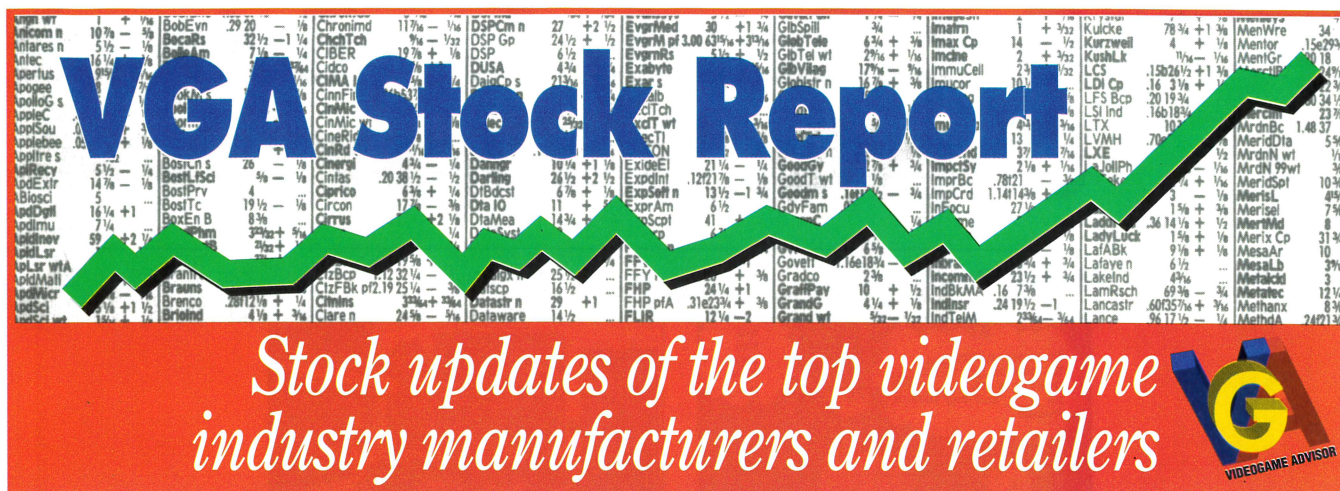
Title: Virtua Fighter Remix
Platform: Saturn (Japan)
Genre: Fighting
Size: CD
Publisher: Sega of Japan
Developer: AM2
Available: Now (Import)
Wholesale: \$60.00
SRP: \$80.00
VGA Rating: A-

It is a well known fact that production on the original *Virtua Fighter* for Saturn was rushed to ensure it's availability for the November '94 Japanese launch. In doing so, gamers ended up with a so-so version of the arcade mega-hit, and a sinking feeling that they had purchased a relatively limited piece of 'next generation' hardware. However, Sega has completely dispelled these suspicions by not only matching the arcade version, but enhancing it with beautiful texture maps in *Virtua Fighter Remix*.

This new version is an attempt to paint over previous mistakes and the Saturn's initially lackluster polygon-rendering ability by showing gamers what Sega's in-house developer, AM2, has learned in the months since VF's release. Other than the new texture maps that make the characters now closely resemble those in VF2, AM2 has spent time repairing the polygonal breakup that cursed the original, added new character artwork to the menu screen, new sound effects, and a few new outfits for the fighters. Currently, Sega of America has no plans to release a US version until after VF2 hits the shelves this Christmas, making this import title a very hot commodity on our shores.

Bottom Line: Although some will be content with their original copies, many import Saturn owners will go to great lengths to replace their versions with Remix. If you have clientele that purchases import Saturn software, this game will sell.

— Aaron Zachlod



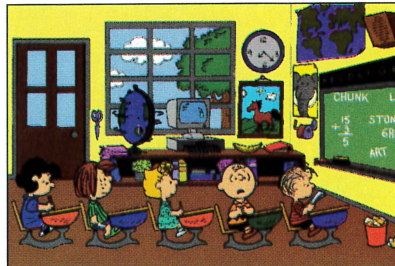
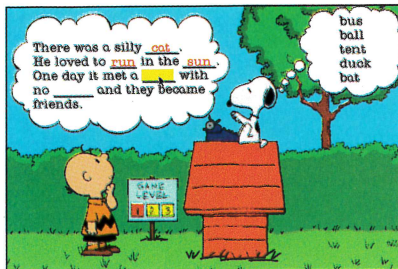
VGA Stock Report

Company	Symbol	Closing Price 7/10/95	Closing Price 7/17/95	Annual High	Annual Low
3DO	THDO	12.63	11.75	25.00	8.75
Acclaim	AKLM	20.00	23.31	25.00	13.25
Activision	ATVI	6.75	10.00	8.00	3.38
Apple Computer	AAPL	48.63	49.00	50.94	26.38
Atari	ATC	2.63	2.81	7.75	2.50
Disney	DIS	54.63	54.50	60.00	37.75
Electronic Arts	ERTS	31.00	34.50	36.13	13.25
Game Tek	GAME	2.50	2.50	4.75	1.56
Matsushita	MC	168.50	171.63	180.63	131.50
Microsoft	MSFT	98.88	109.00	103.63	47.25
Sony Corp.	SNE	52.63	54.38	61.25	42.50
Spectrum Holobyte	SBYT	18.63	19.38	20.00	8.00
Symantic	SYMC	27.00	25.88	30.00	11.13
Time Warner	TWX	43.50	43.38	43.50	31.50
Viacom	VIA	45.38	48.38	49.50	35.63
Ames Stores	AMES	2.56	2.63	4.31	2.00
Bradlees	BLE	1.88	1.63	17.25	.88
Caldor	CLD	16.50	16.00	32.50	14.63
Circuit City	CC	33.00	33.88	33.50	20.88
Egg Head	EGGS	13.50	13.63	14.25	6.13
Good Guys	GGUY	11.88	12.88	13.75	9.25
Hills Stores	HDS	23.38	21.50	24.88	18.13
K Mart	KM	14.75	15.50	18.63	11.88
Staples	SPLS	30.63	32.06	32.00	15.81
Tops Appliance	TOPS	4.63	5.13	10.75	3.88
Toys R Us	TOY	28.63	28.88	39.00	23.75

All Stock Quotes Are Taken From America On-Line

Get Ready for School: Charlie Brown

By VGA Staff Reporter



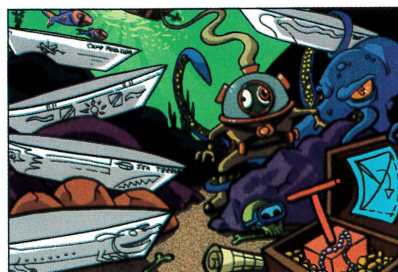
Title: Get Ready for School, Charlie Brown
Platform: Edutainment
Genre: PC CD/Mac CD

Size: 1 CD
Publisher: Virgin Sound & Vision
Developer: Virgin Sound & Vision
Available: October

Charlie Brown is about to get his own interactive dictionary. The excellent new title from Virgin Sound & Vision gives children the chance to see all 1,000 words that are in the dictionary. Virgin will send kids to school, to a 'Spelling B', on a fun filled flight over Europe, and the whole time the kids will be learning new words and not even knowing it. Bill Melendez Studios and some top educators have worked with Virgin to make sure that this is the best possible interactive dictionary available. With a license such as this, *Get Ready for School* may do well for the reference/edutainment genre. **VGA**

Paperopolis

By VGA Staff Reporter



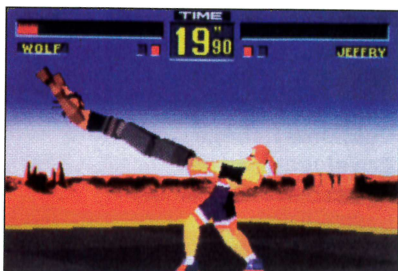
Title: Paperopolis
Platform: Edutainment
Genre: PC CD/Mac CD
Size: 1 CD

Publisher: Virgin Sound & Vision
Developer: Virgin Sound & Vision
Available: October

Paperopolis appears to be an entertaining title for kids ages 6 to 12. This title is loaded with 750 3-D images that kids design with, and then print out. This upcoming Edutainment title from Virgin Sound & Vision should keep kids happy for hours on end, all the while stimulating creative thinking. Ted the toad, the animated frog with an attitude, will help kids explore this new and exciting world. Not only does *Paperopolis* have a large amount of variety, but it also features Jim Cummings from *The Lion King* and *Animaniacs*. *Paperopolis* looks to be a great Edutainment title for children of all ages. **VGA**

Virtua Fighter 32X

By VGA Staff Reporter



Title: Virtua Fighter 32X
Platform: 32X
Genre: Fighting
Size: 3MB
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega
Available: November

this is Sega's
answer to last
year's Donkey
Kong Country
on the
Super Nintendo

Sega's flagship title for the forgotten 32X system this Christmas season will be a translation of the arcade monster *Virtua Fighter*. Surprising many who insisted that it simply couldn't be done on the awkward 32X hardware, VF is a straight port of the original that maintains almost identical game play, but suffers significant drop-off in the number of polygons present. Sega is continuing to back this platform through the Christmas season, and plans to target the gaming demographic that wants 32-Bit but can't afford to shell-out for the 'next generation.' Essentially, this is Sega's answer to last year's *Donkey Kong Country* on the Super Nintendo. The question is, will that demographic purchase the 32X, or will it hold out for price drops on superior platforms that promise to eventually enter the 32X's neighborhood.

As we all know, *Virtua Fighter* is a polygon-based 3D fighter with 8 different characters and more moves than anyone could perform in one round. The description remains the same in this version, but as these graphics show, the game's look has been greatly simplified. Players will find that the fighting is still fluid and smooth, but anyone who's seen it on the Saturn will be frustrated by the compromise.

Expect this title to turn quite a few heads upon its release, especially with Sega's legendary marketing. However this game will not be out-selling *Virtua Fighter 2* for the Saturn, releasing around the same time. **VGA**



Batman & Robin

By VGA Staff Reporter



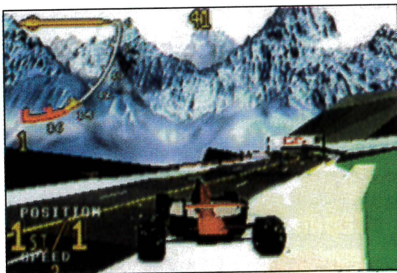
Title: Batman & Robin
Platform: Sega CD
Genre: Racing/Shooter
Size: CD

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega
Available: September

Having recently released *Batman & Robin* for the Genesis, and with a Game Gear version on the way, Sega is now completing a Sega CD translation of the *Batman: Animated Series* property. This incarnation however, bears a strong distinction from its predecessors in that it involves no side-scrolling levels of any kind. Similar to Sega's previous Bat-outing for the Sega CD, *Batman Returns*, this game is strictly driving and flying. Sega was able to work closely with the production house responsible for the series, including 15 minutes of original animation and using actual artwork for the characters and backgrounds. The result is an elegant driving game that appears to be one of Sega's best, albeit last, Sega CD titles. **VGA**

Virtua Racing

By VGA Staff Reporter



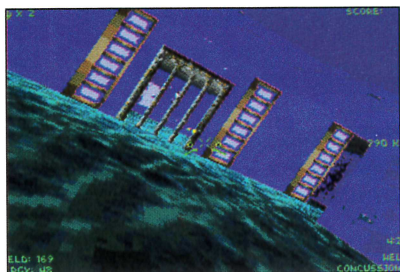
Title: Virtua Racing
Platform: Saturn
Genre: Racing
Size: CD

Publisher: Time Warner Int.
Developer: Time Warner Int.
Available: August

The classic game that blew away arcade-goers years ago with its revolutionary use of polygon-rendering is now heading toward the Saturn with more than a few additions to keep things interesting. *Virtua Racing*, AM2's first hit and the predecessor to *Daytona USA*, will be a highly modified version of the original, easily dwarfing both the Genesis and 32X translations with 7 new tracks and 4 new vehicles as well as the obvious improvements in general quality. The hindrance to this title's success however, may be its too little, too late feel. *Daytona USA* has long since been released on the Saturn, and the incredible *Sega Rally* is heading to the system this Christmas. *Virtua Racing* may turn out to be an excellent game and fare very well as a result, but the focus among gamers has definitely moved on to more recent translations. **VGA**

Descent 2

By VGA Staff Reporter



Title: Descent 2
Platform: DOS CD, Win '95 CD
Genre: 3D Shooter
Size: CD
Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Parallax
Available: October

...internet news-
groups have been
set up exclusively
devoted to the
discussion of
the game...

Since the release of *Doom* two years ago, hordes of game developers have been struggling to take the genre to the next level, top ID's breakthrough masterpiece, and create the game that becomes the successor to the 3D Shooter throne. Of the many attempts, only a handful have matched *Doom's* excellence. But earlier this year, Parallax Software, a small developer under Interplay's publishing label, released a game that was immediately embraced by the massive *Doom* audience. *Descent* swept through gaming circles and across college campuses with its fully-realized 3D environment, 6 degrees of motion, and engaging 8 player network ability. After several months on the market, its popularity has become so strong that internet newsgroups have been set up exclusively devoted to the discussion of the game, and both official and unofficial Web sites offer additional information. Few hardcore *Doom*-addicts will deny that *Descent* has usurped the mighty throne.

It was inevitable that this title would receive a sequel. However few suspected that it would hit so soon after the original. Right now, Interplay is

gearing up for the recently moved-up release of the guaranteed blockbuster, *Descent 2*, on both DOS and Windows '95. This new version will attempt to go above and beyond the original with a wide array of new features and missions. If you already carry PC software, this is a no-risk title. *Descent's* built in audience will seek this game out. If not, this is yet another reason to look into the amazing innovations being made on PCs: **VGA**



Command & Conquer

By VGA Staff Reporter



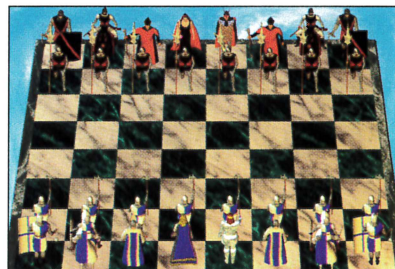
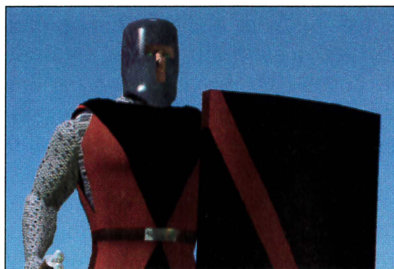
Title: Command & Conquer
Platform: PC CD
Genre: 2 CD's
Size: Strategy

Publisher: Westwood Studios
Developer: Virgin Interactive Ent.
Available: August

Westwood Studios is putting the finishing touches on their new strategy game, *Command & Conquer*. In the future, the U.N. has setup the Global Defense Initiative (GDI) in order to stop the Brotherhood of Nod from taking control of the earth. The GDI and brotherhood are equipped with the latest, most destructive weapons and superior defense capabilities. Now, it's time to stop the evil of the Brotherhood of Nod and save the world. The player can play as either side and will literally be drawn into *Command & Conquer*. Westwood has included FMV 3-D rendered cinemas and characters. This should be one of the best selling strategy games ever, and a must buy for all strategy fans. There is no reason why this amazing looking title shouldn't sell like hot cakes, should you have a customer base appropriate to this genre. **VGA**

Chess Wars

By VGA Staff Reporter



Title: Chess Wars
Platform: PC CD, Mac CD, 3DO
Genre: Chess
Size: CD

Publisher: Art Data Interactive
Developer: Art Data Interactive
Available: August

Art Data Interactive plans to revolutionize the centuries-old game of chess with *Chess Wars: A Medieval Fantasy*. *Chess Wars* presents the player with the traditional game of chess, but when a piece 'takes' another piece the player is treated to a full-motion video scene of the capture. Art Data Interactive states that plot and character development will add to the involvement of the game. Upon this, Carl Hartman, *Chess Wars* producer, states that "You actually become emotionally attached to the characters throughout the course of the game, and losing a piece becomes more than just a matter of points." To add to the professionalism of the movie sequences, Art Data Interactive hired a three-time Emmy-winning writer, experienced special effects artists, professional stunt men, and others, hoping to make the end result a true theater-like movie. *Chess Wars* is due out in August. **VGA**

Vectorman

By VGA Staff Reporter



Title: VectorMan
Platform: Genesis
Genre: Side-Scroller
Size: 2MB
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega
Available: September

*VectorMan
could turn
out to be a
surprise hit.*

Perhaps one of Sega's last Genesis titles and easily its most hyped for this Christmas season, *VectorMan* will be hitting the now aging system this September. Taking place in the obligatory distant future, VectorMan is a robot determined to save mankind from the evil WarHead by shooting his way through a series of side-scrolling levels. *VectorMan* is considered to be a breakthrough for the Genesis system in that the character's animations are generated 'on the fly' by the system's hardware, rather than being chosen from a memory-heavy database of character images. The result of this new technique is a smaller cartridge size (which translates into a lower price), and smoother character animation.

Sega was able to fill this cartridge with impressive lighting techniques and visual effects that are rarely seen on the now feeble 16-Bit systems. The title has all the excellent game play that one would expect from a Sega in-house production, including power-ups that 'morph' VectorMan into a wide selection of vehicles, and a variety of different weapons.

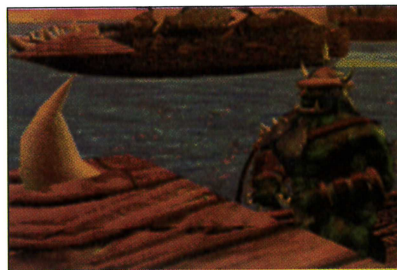
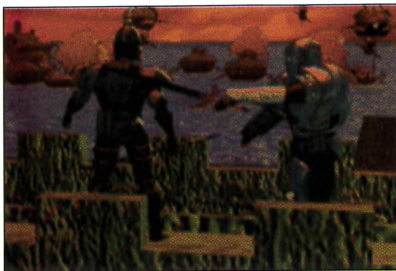
This will be one of the prime Genesis titles for '95. There are currently

about 18 million Genesis owners, and it is unlikely that more than 10 percent of that audience will be upgrading until after this year, leaving a gigantic user base that this game will target. With the industry's sights currently set firmly on 32 and 64-Bit, *VectorMan* could turn out to be a surprise hit. **VGA**



WarCraft 2: Tides of Darkness

By VGA Staff Reporter



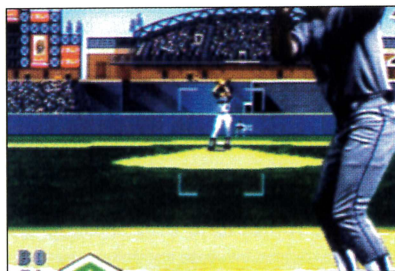
Title: WarCraft 2: Tides of Darkness
Platform: PC CD
Genre: Strategy
Size: CD

Publisher: Blizzard Entertain.
Developer: Blizzard/Davidson
Available: November

Blizzard set a new standard in the seek-out and destroy strategy game *Warcraft: Humans and Orcs*. Now they try to do it again in the upcoming sequel, *Warcraft: Tides of Darkness*. The humans have been defeated and are fleeing to a new home, and of course, the Orcs are right behind them each step of the way. The sequel will add new types of soldiers including land and air troops. Watch for Warcraft to be one of the big sellers this fall for PC CD-ROM. **VGA**

World Series '95

By VGA Staff Reporter



Title: World Series '95
Platform: Genesis 32X
Genre: Baseball
Size: 3MB

Publisher: Sega Sports
Developer: Sega
Available: October

Sega Sports is planning on bringing its highly successful baseball game *World Series Baseball* to the Genesis 32X. The game will incorporate all 28 major league stadiums, and all 28 teams and their players. Sega has improved the graphics a hair, and the sound as much as possible. Look for Sega Sports' *World Series Baseball '95* to debut with a bang as quality sports titles are less than abundant on the 32X. Sega need only produce more high quality titles like this if they want a 32X success. The only thing better than this title will be *World Series Baseball*, (formally known as *Grand Slam Baseball*), for the Saturn. **VGA**

VGA

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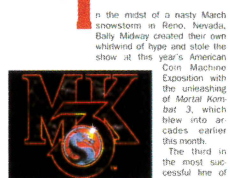
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ACME '95 Kombat Ensues & the "Kaos" Continues

By Glenn Rubenstein



The folks at Midway are determined to make 1995 the "Year of Mortal Kombat."

In the midst of a nasty March snowstorm in Reno, Nevada, Billy Midway created their own whirlwind of hype and stole the show at this year's American Coin Machine Exposition with the unleashing of Mortal Kombat 3, which blew into arcades earlier this month.

The third in the most successful line of arcade games of all time has been anticipated for months now, ever since first word trickled onto the Internet and game magazines started printing any information they could get their hands on. The game is in arcades and the folks at Midway are determined to make 1995 the "Year of Mortal Kombat."

For starters, the game is phenomenal. Good enough to sky on the top of the charts all summer long and then some. The game contains 14 playable characters, new fatalities (those things most associated with Mortal Kombat on the night news), and tons of other hidden moves. The graphics and animation are better than ever, since the overall specs of the hardware have been increased. Needless to say, the game is top notch.

The most exciting new feature from an industry perspective is that Midway has added "Kombat Kodes" into the game. This little "briefcase style" combination lock found in the match-up screen of the game, lets players enter combinations that "unlock" special powers, secret characters, and other nifty "easter eggs." Midway will be releasing these codes in their print and television ads, the Mortal Kombat Live Tour (scheduled to begin in later summer), and in the future film, which is due into theaters this August. Combined, high player interest is expected in arcades well into the fall—especially since Midway scores not one penny of the code, leaving players to spend quarters to find the missing symbol, which is required for the code to work.

Further, Midway is no longer distributing home versions of their games through industry giant

Glenn Rubenstein also writes for the San Francisco Chronicle and Boston magazine. He is frequently called upon as an industry expert and therefore is infrequently making TV and radio appearances.



Acclaim (although many in the industry speculate that Acclaim's pathway of gold has at last vanished due to this loss). So when they release their home version of Mortal Kombat 3 this fall on home platforms, a new ROM upgrade will be available free to arcade owners.

This ROM upgrade will contain new characters, new scenery, new fatalities, and other hidden goodies. These features will not be found in ANY home version. Midway is even battling mess

information spreads very quickly amongst not only hard-core players, but members of online services and Internet users. Midway's "missing pieces" won't remain secret for long. Overall, this game is definite A+ material and is sure to be the hottest title of 1995, both in the arcades and on home systems.

Other Notable Mentions
Elsewhere at ACME, Sega was showing Virtual Soccer, an impressive game scheduled to launch early this summer.

Capcom was showing Street Fighter II: The Movie which contains digitized footage from the movie combined with the standard fighting expected from the past Street Fighter games. The game should be in arcades in late Spring and only further confirms large field industry speculation that Capcom is losing ground as an arcade powerhouse. **VGA**



Arcade Advisor

By Hal Hufnagel

If you haven't yet preordered your order for MKIII, you will probably notice a difficult time finding units that materialize distributors will part with at anything less than a premium. However, many distributors and subcontractors also do have units or some options that you, as the buyer, may want to seriously consider.

Generally speaking, most distributors whom deal directly with the factories prefer leasing the machines, as this usually represents the most cost-effective method of doing business for a high-traffic retailer. Leasing has its perks, in that the contract typically includes free servicing, pickup and delivery.

With rental of arcade equipment, one of the new pre-order notices should be received to share a split of the profits as the form of payment. Here, a 50/50 or 60/40 split is generally the rule of thumb. Most rental chain stores and "Mini & Popcorn" tend to do quite well—providing that the game is an A-rated

title. A quick word of caution should be noted... if you are not experiencing a high amount of foot traffic after placing the deal with your distributor, expect him to downgrade your equipment to B-rated games. It is here that a vicious little cycle may begin and cause the manager more trouble than it is worth. With the lower rated game you will receive less foot traffic than before and therefore, less profit. As a general rule, generally, choose with one's distributor over who was responsible.

The bottom line is... don't get trapped. Know your customer and your store. If you have a fair amount of teenagers hanging out, expect a brand new Mortal Kombat 3 machine to send your net sales through the roof. On the other hand, a family store should proceed with caution. Whether you're considering purchasing, leasing or renting, keep in mind that the arcade industry has traditionally been a cash center for many a merchant on the home version. It is prudent to be at least familiar with what's hot and what's not. **VGA**

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Doom

By VGA Staff Reporter



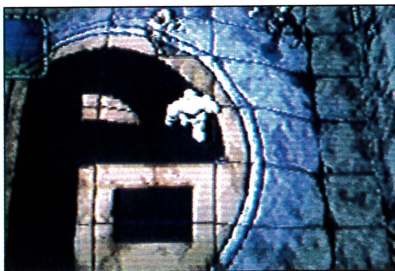
Title: Doom
Platform: SNES
Genre: 3D Shooter
Size: 2 MB

Publisher: Williams Entert.
Developer: ID Software
Available: September

When you have the non-gaming public talking about a piece of software that has become a household name, you have a "mega-hit" on your hands. The "mega-hit" to which we are referring is *Doom*. A game whose style has been copied, expanded upon and completely ripped-off since its release just a few years ago. In time, *Doom* will probably find it's way to each and every platform available. This September, the best selling PC game in history will make itself quite comfortable on the SNES. This translation features all of the monsters, weapons and bosses, (something that even the Jaguar version lacked), incorporated through 22 levels straight from the original classic. The 'controversial' violence that *Doom* is known for remains intact, so Nintendo owners should be thrilled that they will be able to reduce the enemy to a quivering pile of slush. **VGA**

Loaded

By VGA Staff Reporter



Title: Loaded
Platform: PSX
Genre: Adventure/Shooter
Size: CD

Publisher: US Gold
Developer: Gremlin Int.
Available: 4th Quarter

Packaged in with the enormously vast heap of quality PSX titles debuted at the E3 was Gremlin's overhead shooter, *Loaded*. *Loaded* is similar in appearance to games like *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*, but Gremlin has gone above and beyond the call of duty by entering in objects such as walls and furniture as polygon-based structures rather than simple, flat, blocks. The effect created by this attention to detail is fantastic, and something that all gamers will appreciate. The focus of the game is on pure carnage. The player stomps through room after zombie-infested room, with rarely a second going by when any one of a massive selection of weapons is not being fired. It is difficult to judge the sales potential of a game that is releasing on a platform with such competitive software as the PlayStation, but early signs would point to this being a mild hit. **VGA**

Fade To Black

By VGA Staff Reporter



Title: Fade To Black
Platform: PC CD, PSX
Genre: 3D Shooter/Quest
Size: CD
Publisher: EA Studio
Developer: Delphine Software
Available: September (PC), November (PSX)

Be prepared for
Fade to Black to
be a big 4th quarter
success.

Years after the successful original, Delphine Software is back with the sequel to *Flashback*, titled *Fade to Black* (previously *Crossfire*). Picking up where the last one left off, Conrad (the main character) finds that his drifting escape pod has been pulled aboard an alien vessel of the same origin as the planet he just destroyed. The less than pleased aliens throw him into a cell, where he is promptly sprung by a group of rebels. Conrad must find his way out of the alien ship and back to Earth in time to stop the new invasion.

Fade to Black departs from the platform-based original by taking place within a full-fledged 3D environment, very similar to the recent PC title, *BioForge*. Advanced motion capturing technology was used to convert the fluid movement of a live actor into a detailed polygon framework for Conrad's body. The game blends a puzzle-solving quest adventure with sporadic alien shoot-outs and excellent cinemas to create a well-rounded successor to the first. Take note however, as is the case with many recent PC titles, users will need a strong processor to deal with the hefty amount of polygons. Some PC owners may be alienated by the game's hardware demands.

This should be a big hit for EA Studio on both PC and its eventual conversion to the PlayStation. Delphine has developed a strong reputation among players for developing quality products, and will no doubt enhance this reputation with their latest outing. Be prepared for *Fade to Black* to be a big 4th quarter success. **VGA**



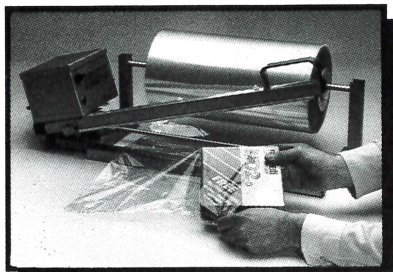
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September 10 -11 ECTS (Electronic Consumer Trade Show) London, England +44.181.742.2828	11-14 Information Super Highway Summit Santa Clara, California 800.225.4698	16-18 Focus on Video Mississauga, Ontario 416.531.2121	18 Object-Oriented Technology Symposium New York, New York 800.829.3976
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A: It truly boils down to advertising. The average consumer magazine is approximately 100 pages in length and run at 55 to 70% advertising. Since we are a new trade magazine, it is taking us some time to establish a reputation. However, if you do the math, you shall see that we are (editorially speaking), one of the largest monthly and the only industry publication.

Q: It has been said that the Sony PlayStation will be capable of multi-player games. How are they able to do this without the use of a modem?

A: At the launch of their system, or shortly thereafter, Sony will be releasing a peripheral known as the Combat Cable. This device will allow for two players to race and fight against each other without the inconvenience of a split screen display. To enable this it is required that you have two PSX's with two TV's and two copies of the game being played. The cable should retail for around \$20 to \$30.

Q: During one of Sega's commercials they stated that their Saturn was capable of 500,000 polygons a second. On the other hand, just about every videogame magazine out there said it could only do 200,000. What's the deal?

A: Both statements are true, but there are some technical differences not being mentioned. The Saturn is capable of 500,000 polygons per second, but that is for plain, un-shaded, untextured, and un-light sourced polygons, similar to the ones in Virtua Fighter. In order to display texture mapping and other added effects that have become commonplace, the polygon count drops to somewhere in the neighborhood of 200,000. Sega simply uses the larger number for marketing purposes. **VGA**

TOP TEN

VGA's List of TOP TENS

Top Ten American Videogame Titles

1. **Triple Play Baseball '96** (GEN)
2. **Justice League** (SNS, GEN)
3. **Judge Dredd** (SNS)
4. **Wing Commander 3** (3DO)
5. **Batman and Robin** (GEN)
6. **Power Rangers: The Movie** (SNS)
7. **Slam and Jam '95** (3DO)
8. **Eternal Champions** (SCD)
9. **World Series '95** (SNS)
10. **EarthBound** (SNS)

Top Ten U.K.

Videogame Titles

1. **Star Trek: TNG** (PC)
2. **Brian Lara Cricket** (MGD)
3. **Colonization** (AMI)
4. **Daytona USA** (SAT)
5. **Wing Comander 3** (3DO)
6. **Theme Park** (MGD, 3DO)
7. **Street Racer** (MGD)
8. **Ultimate Soccer** (AMI)
9. **FX Fighter** (PC)
10. **Fever Pitch Soccer** (SNS, MGD)

Top Ten PC CD Titles

1. **Flight Unlimited**
2. **Space Quest 6: The Spinal Frontier**
3. **Full Throttle**
4. **Flight Simulator 5.1**
5. **Descent**
6. **Dark Forces**
7. **Myst**
8. **Doom 2**
9. **Virtural Pool**
10. **Slipstream 5000**

Top Ten Import Titles

1. **Shin Shinobi Den** (SAT)
2. **Virtua Fighter Remix** (SAT)
3. **Ace Combat** (PSX)
4. **Clockwork Knight 2** (SAT)
5. **Dragon Ball Z** (PSX)
6. **Greatest 9 Baseball** (SAT)
7. **Tekken** (PSX)
8. **Jumping Flash** (PSX)
9. **Toh Shin Den** (PSX)
10. **D's Diner** (3DO)

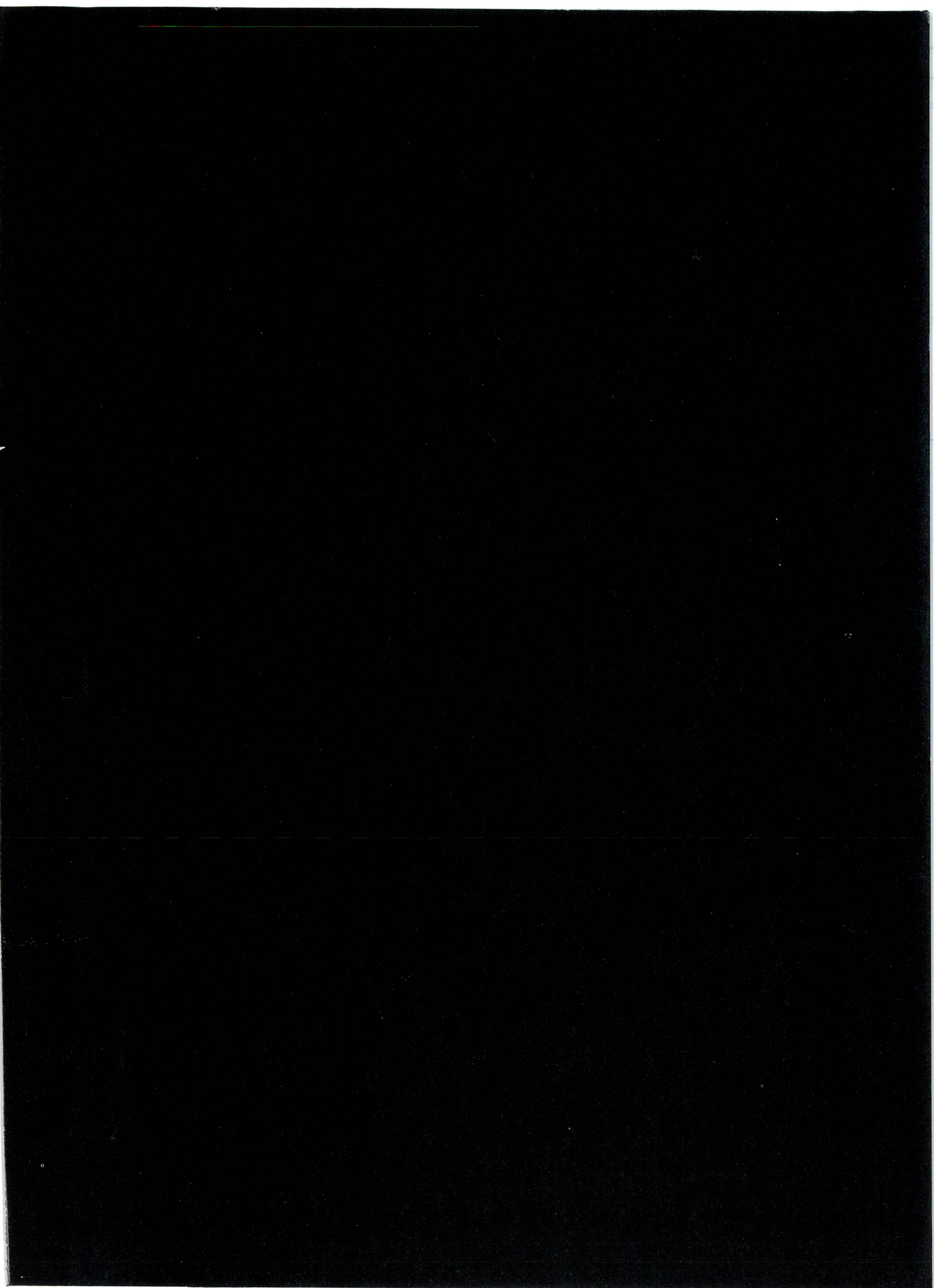
IMPORT REPORT

By Marcus Irwin

Both the PlayStation and Saturn will be going head to head against each other in the U.K this September. The major selling points for the Saturn will be Virtual Fighter and Daytona, and for the PlayStation, Ridge Racer, Toshinden and Tekken. Yet, the 3DO may be stealing sales away from the big two by pushing Street Fighter X, Need for Speed and Road Rash.

Now it doesn't take a nuclear physicist to work out the pattern here, what is the formula for having the best selling console in Europe this year? Driving and fighting games are the answer to a budding console manufacturer interested in a successful launch and it seems that the PlayStation has the edge on both accounts. The most eagerly awaited beat 'em up is Mortal Kombat 3, widely published to be coming out on the PlayStation first. Round one to Sony. The most eagerly anticipated driving games in Europe are coming from Psygnosis U. K. and they are Wipeout and Demolition Derby. These two games have been in almost every computer magazine in the last 3 months and customer awareness of these titles is massive, Psygnosis hasn't even spent a penny on advertisement yet. That's round 2 to Sony.

With the Saturn out in the U.K., now retailing at \$399.99, the 3DO retailing at \$349.99 and the PlayStation expected to be released at \$299.99, I think we can safely say... that's round 3 to Sony. But we'll just have to wait and see what happens with sport sims, role-playing games, doom clones, simulators, etc., etc. to see if Sony can keep this record up. I doubt Sega and 3DO will give up the fight yet as there's still a lot to fight for and many battles to be won and lost. **VGA**



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